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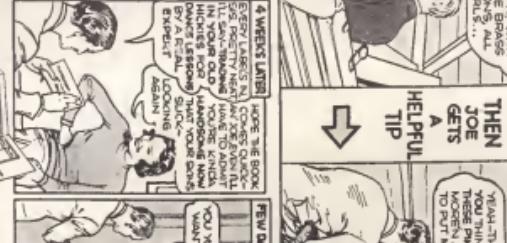
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(Slightly off subject, but I have seen some very good reviews of the new *Star Trek* movies in the last few days. If you're interested, see newspapers, or ask your local grocer.)



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VOL. 16

Contents for June, 1937

NO. 3

SMASHING AIR NOVEL

PATROL OF THE SPIDER.....*O. B. Myers* 8

The story of Ben Bourke who sought to put a squadron in the air and fly them all with his personal courage. It is also the story of Heinrich von Speldar, the man who wove his web of death in the sky and killed because he liked to!

GRIPPING SHORT STORIES

THE BARON DRINKS TO DEATH.....	<i>William Hartley</i>	35
Molloy and McNamara try a little experiment that hits them right between the eyes!		
ACES FLY ALONE.....	<i>Darrell Jordan</i>	48
The workings of a master spy are as strange as the game of war.		
BLOOD FOR A FLEDGLING.....	<i>William Porter</i>	59
The fight of a rookie to earn his wings in the face of Sudden Death!		
THE BRANDED EAGLE.....	<i>Robert J. Hogan</i>	72
The Red Falcon flies again—to shed his traitor's wings!		
BULLETS FOR NOTHING.....	<i>Robert Sidney Bowen</i>	85
Two guys who had nothing on their minds but the scalping of each other.		
THE DEVIL COMES TO LONDON.....	<i>Marshall Perham</i>	93
A story of valor and death in the sky.		

SPECIAL SKY FEATURES

ASEMBLIT.....	<i>Frederick Blakeslee</i>	57
A new game for the air-minded—make it and you can have it!		
STORY BEHIND THE COVER.....		58
Interesting facts about the ships on the cover.		
TODAY'S BOMBERS	<i>Norman Witcomb</i>	84
* The flying fortresses of modern times.		
SKY SECRETS.....	<i>George Evans</i>	69
Flying facts and information.		
THE HOT AIR CLUB.....	<i>Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg</i>	105
The gathering of the Screwballs—over Ginsburg's dead body!		

JULY ISSUE OUT MAY 25

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MANY years have hastened into history and many rains have left their tears upon those tombs that reach with ghostlike fingers from the grave. Certain of these graves are marked, but many more have been forgotten, and the weeds that brown in mid-day sun and sweep with the careless breeze, seem to wail in remorse for the dead men at their roots.

Some of these men who lie beneath the earth, were distinguished once for living above the earth, and having flown in mechanical birds where men of lesser courage would not dare to be. These are the sky fighters of a past generation who lost in the game of Death, but they are also the ones who painted the sky with a costly crown of glory.

Much has been written about these men who flew in wartime, both of the pilots who died and the airmen who lived; but so great is their hold on the imagination, so enduring the flame of their courage, that we will find ourselves returning to that era for so long as there is adventure in the hearts of men.

There is the story of Hobey Baker, once captain of the Princeton football team and the swiftest and fiercest blade on collegiate hockey rinks. Baker, with others like himself, was swept into the war. Probably he had no desire to kill or be killed, but that was another matter. It was a matter beyond personal choice, the war was there to be fought—to be fought by the young whose bodies were stronger, whose eyes were keener, whose courage and nerves would be less apt to falter.

It is fitting, perhaps, that Hobey Baker joined the Aviation Corps and accepted the challenge of the sky, and was again pitted in a game of daring skill, much as he had been at Princeton. Only this was a different kind of game, where the players played for keeps, where the score

(Continued on page 6)

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Dare-Devil Aces

(Continued from page 4)

was kept in scorching lead, where failure permitted no second chance.

Hobey played this new game well, so well indeed that when the war ended, he was the same healthy man that had starred at Princeton. He was older, of course, and probably wiser; but he had played the game with unusual talent, and had broken his date with Death. It was some weeks after the Armistice, on a Saturday afternoon. Hobey flew above the field practising air maneuvers, seeking perfection for his own satisfaction, even as he might have been drop-kicking a football, just for the fun of the thing. But something happened in that empty sky; something happened that folded the wings of the plane that Hobey was flying, and Death rushed up to claim him.

There are happier stories, however, in the files of Aviation's glamorous history. There is the story of William Bishop, considered by many the greatest of wartime aces. Bishop was a Canadian who carried the British colors through 72 victories, a modest boy who wore lightly the acclaim of the allied nations. Unlike Hobey Baker, he was treated kindly by the fates and is today a prosperous business man.

There are also the stories of Guynemeyer and Richofen to be told again and again. Of Guynemeyer, believed by the French to be a savior, a figure whose legend grows with the years, and whose exploits read like the deeds of Joan D'Arc. Richofen, the German, has not been forgotten. It matters not that he flew for the other side, it was the manner in which he flew—gallantly, courageously, with disdain for himself and a burning love for the colors he served.

We think these stories should be told again, in a series that will embrace them all. In future issues we intend to accomplish this, and weave for the present generation some of the magic that has lingered from the past.

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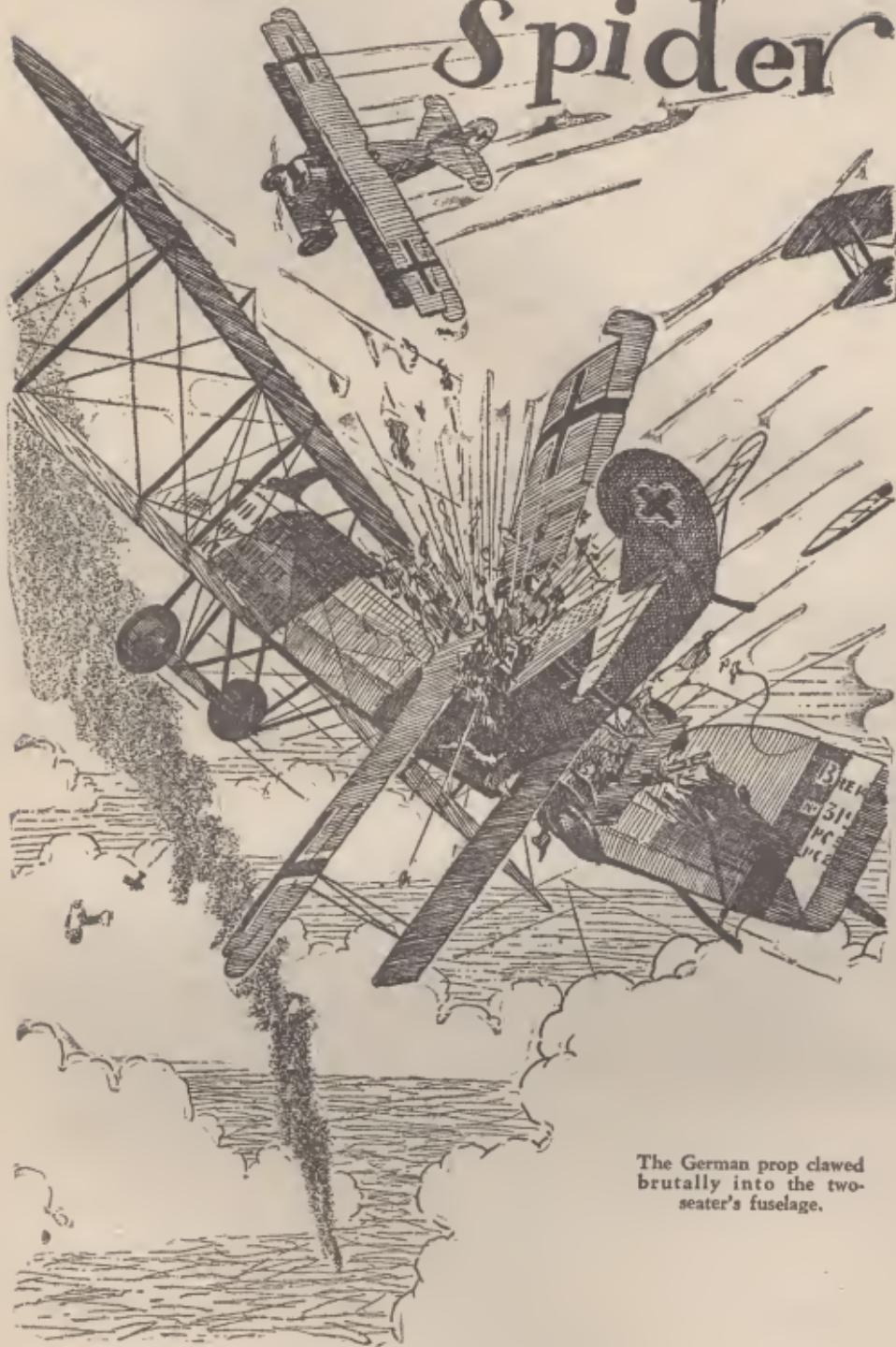
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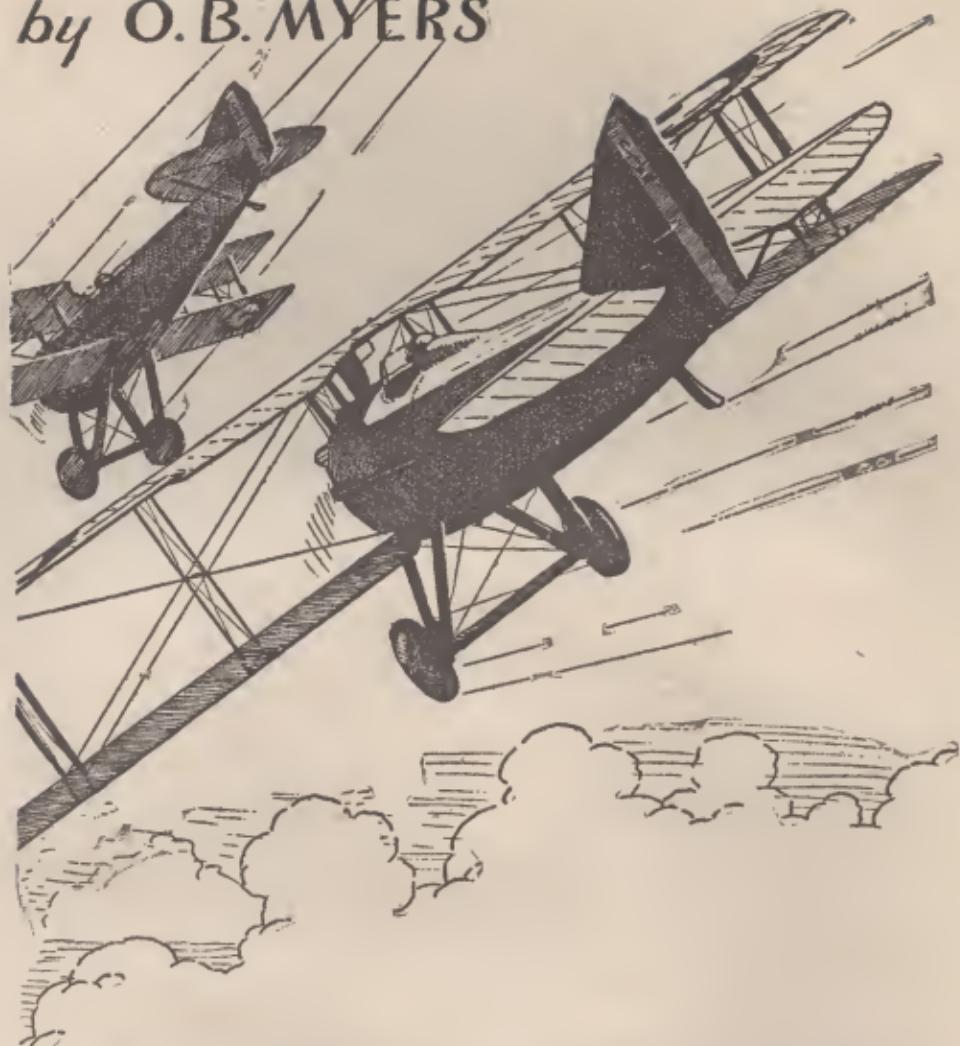
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20x4-82	82	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.25	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-84	84	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.30	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-86	86	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.35	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-88	88	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.40	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-90	90	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.45	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-92	92	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.50	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-94	94	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.55	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-96	96	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.60	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-98	98	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.65	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-100	100	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.70	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-102	102	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.75	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-104	104	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.80	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-106	106	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.85	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-108	108	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.90	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-110	110	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$4.95	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-112	112	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.00	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-114	114	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.05	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-116	116	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.10	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-118	118	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.15	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-122	122	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.25	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-124	124	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.30	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-136	136	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.60	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-138	138	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.65	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-142	142	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.75	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-144	144	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.80	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-146	146	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.85	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-148	148	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.90	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-150	150	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$5.95	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-152	152	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.00	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-154	154	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.05	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-156	156	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.10	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-158	158	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.15	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-166	166	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.35	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-168	168	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.40	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-170	170	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.45	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-176	176	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.60	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-180	180	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.70	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-182	182	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.75	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-184	184	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.80	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-186	186	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.85	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-188	188	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.90	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-190	190	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$6.95	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-212	212	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$7.50	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-216	216	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$7.60	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-218	218	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$7.65	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-220	220	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$7.70	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-222	222	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$7.75	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
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20x4-242	242	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$8.25	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-244	244	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$8.30	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-246	246	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$8.35	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-248	248	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$8.40	\$0.35	20x4	\$2.45	\$0.35
20x4-250	250	\$2.45	\$0.35	21x4	\$8.45	\$0.35	20x4		

Patrol of the Spider



The German prop clawed brutally into the two-seater's fuselage.

by O. B. MYERS



Ben Bourke had the courage to spread his wings against the Patrol of the Spider, but you cannot fight with the aid of a squadron whose souls are gripped in fear! For fear was the curse of the 94th, and it spiked the guns of its pilots—brave men whose courage had fallen away to rot in the Spider's Web!

CHAPTER ONE

Leave Cancelled!

MAJOR PAINTER burst hatless and coatless out of the door of headquarters. In his hand he held a paper, an official document which he had taken only a few seconds before from the

courier's pouch, just arrived; the courier's motorcycle was still in sight.

On the tarmac of the 94th stood five Spads. There was a helmeted head in each cockpit, and all the motors were turning over. As the C.O. took his first step in their direction, one of those motors blasted loudly, and the farthest ship began to move.

The major leaped into a run. He waved the paper frantically, he shouted at the top of his lungs. But above the muttering thunder of five Hissos his voice was little more than a squeak. Some of the mechanics heard him and turned, but the pilot whose attention he was trying to attract never noticed him at all. The Spad took off, and was quickly followed by the second and the third.

Turning finally toward the fifth in line, the C.O. thrust his head into the cockpit and yelled, "Pete, listen! Ben's leave just came through! Leave—Look!" He jiggled the paper under the pilot's nose.

Behind his goggles Pete Sisson's eyes widened, and he nodded. But then he glanced up, where the leading Spad was beginning a wide circle, waiting for the others, and shrugged eloquently.

"Try to keep him this side of the lines!" bawled the C.O.

Pete nodded again and reached for his own throttle. The major drew back hastily, shielded his eyes from the dust-cloud as the Spad took the gun, and then peered up at the hot August sky.

"That's bad," he murmured, shaking his head. "Bad—"

Meanwhile, waiting at a thousand meters for his formation to gather behind him, Ben Bourke knew nothing of what was happening below him. He only knew that he was tired. His eyes were tired, his muscles were tired; his head ached; his nerves were jumpy. Month after month of patrolling high German air, with death leering daily over his shoulder, was taking inexorable toll of his stamina, though he did not realize himself how close he was to the cracking point.

Crossing the river, he circled slowly over Pont-Moutee. The Breguets were

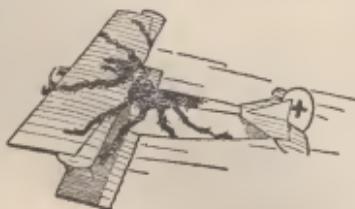
nowhere in sight. After waiting ten minutes he began to feel uneasy. Were they late at the rendezvous or had they already come and gone without waiting for their escort? He could not tell, now. These protection missions were always getting bungled somehow; conflicting orders — misunderstandings over noisy, overworked wires—these and outright errors were continually upsetting the plans.

If he was ahead of the bombers, all he had to do was to wait. But if they had gone on into Germany—Well, they might be needing him badly. Uncertainly he wheeled and flew north.

Crossing the lines, he noticed that Pete Sisson acted queerly. Pete's Spad zoomed up close to his and waggled its wings. The man in the cockpit waved a gloved hand, jerked his head, and pointed toward the south. But Ben had no way of knowing what these antics were about. Ben was leading the patrol and knew only his duty. And then, before he could make a guess at Pete's purpose, Ben saw something far ahead.

It must have been a mistake of art even hour in the rendezvous, for the Breguets had apparently reached their objective, unleashed their bombs, and were now on the way out. Four of them had managed to cling together in a fairly tight formation, with the fifth trailing by no more than a hundred yards. But above them, below, and on all sides, Fokkers snarled and snapped and lunged, raking the bombers from every angle with vicious volleys, trying grimly to break them apart.

Ben's wide-open throttle hauled him thundering toward the running battle, with his four comrades on his heels. But even his two-mile-a-minute haste was not fast enough now. That fifth Breguet seemed to disappear for a moment behind



a screen of banking, black-crossed wings and smoking tracers. The screen parted, and the Allied plane was still there, but it was swirling clumsily into a slow spin. An inert form lolled half out of one cockpit, and smoke eddied from under the cowl. It was doomed.

With a high-strung curse, Ben hurled his Spad into the thick of the running scrap. His first concern was to drive the Boches off the Breguet, and give the awkward two-seaters a chance to escape across the lines. After that, but not before, he would consider his own position. That was why he never thought of looking up at this moment.

THE crackle and sputter of machine guns redoubled as his Spads leaped into action. Tracers laced the sky from new directions, and the Fokkers found themselves assailed by new foes, few in number but savagely bold in tactics. The complexion of the battle altered abruptly.

Ben swirled through a spiral in pursuit of a Jerry, lost his quarry in a zoom, and found another. As the second Fokker banked steeply to lunge for the flank of one of the Breguets, Ben knifed in like a flash. Six guns were churning out leaden death simultaneously; two from the after cockpit of the two-seater, two Spandaus on the German, and Ben's twin Vickers. But the devil's dice rolled snake-eyes.

The Fokker's guns ceased firing. Ben's blast must have drilled the pilot through and through, stunned him to a stony corpse in the flicker of an eyelash. Instead of pulling up, the black-crossed plane nosed forward slightly. In another

breath-taking instant it rammed the Breguet.

THE German prop clawed brutally into the two-seater's fuselage, and fragments flew like confetti. Wings crumpled into shapeless masses. A man's body, wriggling desperately, was flung clear, only to vanish behind a mushroom of smoke that mercilessly hid the gruesome details.

Ben groaned in bitter dismay. It was plane for plane, but two lives for one. And his Spads were presumed to be there to bring the Breguets home safely. His fury welled up like a flame.

The struggle dragged on to the lines, and across. The bombers raced free, those that were left; but the Spads and the

Fokkers hammered away at each other. There were plenty of Boches from the beginning; more than enough to outnumber the Yanks. Which was one reason why Ben never suspected there might be another, lurking above, waiting to strike.

For half a minute he duelled deftly with two foes, keeping them both at bay with short, snarling bursts. Wheeling around and past him, they inadvertently got both on the same side, close together. He whipped over in a lightning turn and charged recklessly.

His fingers held the triggers down now, and his guns chattered a long volley. It began at the wing-tip of one Jerry and ended in the fuselage of the other. The first toppled drunkenly into a spin, but the second, unhurt, wheeled aside. Ben pressed on in pursuit, following every desperate maneuver like a hawk's shadow. At the top of a back-breaking zoom he



found his opening, centered his sights—

The Spad shuddered! There was a drumming in his ears, swift, ominous, terrifying! His head turned, but too late. The Fokker that had plummeted from the zenith without warning was already hard on his tail; so close that he could see the glimmer of scarlet at the muzzle of its yammering Spandaus. He never had time to move his controls before the stick was jerked from his fingers.

The same bullet that slammed the stick out of his grasp creased his wrist, snapping a bone and stunning the muscles of his arm. With the Spad whirling into a spin, he searched blindly for control, losing valuable seconds before he realized that his right arm was not obeying the commands of his brain at all. Then his left hand shoved the throttle shut and seized the stick. But it was like trying to read a printed page in a mirror. Everything seemed backward; each move had to be figured out in advance, and then reversed.

He had lost a thousand meters before he even stopped the spin, and then he was so dizzy he could hardly see. The ship wobbled uncertainly, sliding downward. His eyes rolled, his ears rang, and his sleeve was full of blood. Blinking, he saw a cloud ahead; a soft, grayish-green mass. It would be a good idea to slip through until he had thrown off possible pursuit, he thought. Then he saw, in horror, that it was a tree!

It was not the tree he hit, after all, but a fence of low-strung telephone wires a hundred yards to one side. They tripped the Spad neatly, flung it end over end, and ten minutes later served to carry a message back to an evacuating depot behind the ridge.

"Yeah, we'll rustle him back to yuh," grunted the signal corps sergeant. "But you better have your meat-wagon ready; he's blotto."

It wasn't until Ben woke up in the hos-

pital, six hours later, that he realized why his hours of coma had been filled with dreams about spiders. Those Fokkers, he remembered hazily, had all been painted like that. A solid black circle around the cockpit, with a half dozen gangling, spidery legs radiating from it. He had gotten several brief glimpses, but not so brief as to be forgotten.

In ten days he was strong enough to sit up when the C.O. called.

"So there's your leave, Ben," grinned the major. "Kind of tough to spend it in the hospital, but it might be worse. Your worries are over, as far as combat flying is concerned, anyway."

Ben's jaw sagged. "What the devil do you mean?"

"You're slated for the job of C.O. in one of those new squadrons Wing is putting together at Vancey. How's that sound?"

But Ben only made a feeble grimace of disgust.

CHAPTER TWO

Return of the Spider

IT WAS actually squadron headquarters, that dilapidated and unsightly shack that leaned crazily against the side of the hangar nearest the road, though no one would ever have guessed it. The windows were lop-sided gaps in which was tacked, in lieu of glass, the waxed paper used by the army quartermaster for wrapping meat. The door was merely an absence of wall, where hung a soiled and ragged blanket. If the blanket didn't keep out much cold or dirt, it at least kept in any betraying gleams of light, at night.

This blanket was now jerked abruptly aside and Ben Bourke stepped out on the tarmac. He was actually squadron commander of the 414th, though no one would have guessed that, either. He wore the hob-nailed shoes, wrap puttees, and ordinary O.D. breeches of a common soldier.

Above the waist his leather flying coat, blotched with oil and streaked with soot, hid both the captain's bars on his shoulders and the pilot's wings on his chest. But underneath the jaunty overseas cap his tanned face had a certain firmness of expression that bespoke experience and poise, though a close observer might have noticed an odd slant to his profile, when seen from the right.

He looked up, frowned slightly, and though there was no one near, he spoke loud. "No; no—not so soon!"

From above and behind the hangar a Spad, marked with the number 5, had been sliding in toward the field with idling motor, wings canted in a kind of half slip to reduce its forward speed to a minimum. Just before Ben spoke, the pilot had slapped rudder and stick, straightening out sharply into a flat glide. At the height of the hangar roof, twenty feet off the ground, the Spad floated across the open

field. With all flying speed killed, it was in a dead stall. But while the C.O. held his breath, it rocked a little, settled slowly, and touched. The landing gear went *thock!*

—*br-r-r-r-rump*. It rolled jerkily to a stop.

Ben walked over toward the hangar sergeant. "That's Larry Darstell, isn't it? Tell him I want to see him."

The ship turned and taxied toward B Hangar as the sergeant ran to hold the wing-tip. But then Ben strolled over himself as the pilot lifted his goggles and elbowed up out of the



HEINRICH VON SPEIDAR

narrow seat.

"Larry? What's the matter, afraid this bus will bite you?"

His tone was gently sarcastic, but not harsh. The pilot, who was actually six months Ben's junior but looked and acted six years younger, paused half out of the cockpit and grinned, unabashed.

"Not unless I bite it first. Why, Ben?"

He did not salute, or say "sir;" not be-

HIS NIGHT CLUB BILL WAS \$62!

"Goodbye, Sir" . . . "Thank you, Sir," says the head waiter fervently, as the little party of four leaves the club. And why shouldn't he—for a \$10.00 tip?

Think that's unusual? Not a bit of it. Young men are making lots of money—and spending plenty—these days. Young men full of health, full of snap and power. And you can bet your bottom dollar that these men watch their health like a hawk—that they see to it that their bowels move regularly. For no man can feel right and do his best if he is held back by the curse of constipation.

So if you want to step up your energy,

ous body, remember this one thing and never forget it—*see that your bowels move regularly!*

But the way you move your bowels is important. Instead of taking a laxative that disturbs your system and upsets your stomach, take gentle Ex-Lax.

Ex-Lax limits its action entirely to the intestines, where the actual constipation exists. It gives the intestines a gentle nudge, emptying the bowels thoroughly—but easily and comfortably. Ex-Lax works in such a simple, common-sense way. And it is such a pleasure to take. Ex-Lax tastes just like delicious chocolate. At all drug stores—

cause he was insolent, but simply because Ben was the kind of C.O. that you called 'Ben.'

"Listen, satchel-face. What were you doing all those months in Issoudun? When you make a side-slip landing, *make* a slide-slip landing, will you? Don't give an imitation of a horse lying down in a stall. Fly your plane; don't let the plane fly you. Down as far as the hangar top you were doing a slip landing, all right. Only then you lost your nerve and changed your mind. When you flattened out you must have had angels riding on your under-carriage to keep you from stalling."

"You mean I kicked out too *soon*?" exclaimed Larry. "Gosh, I thought I was low enough to hear the grass growing."

"That must have been your own beard you heard sprouting," grinned Ben. Then he became entirely serious. "No kidding, Larry, you want to fly as if you were the boss, not the ship. A side-slip landing is a good example. You want to go the whole hog, or else don't start it at all. Slip her right down to the last foot, as if you expected somebody to jerk the ground out of the way for you—then snap her out cool as a cucumber. Your wing-tip shouldn't be more than—Here, I'll show you!"

"Will you?" cried Larry. He slid to the ground, delighted. This was only one of the reasons why the men of the 414th called their C.O. Ben. He was both able and willing at a moment's notice to illustrate in person any order or piece of advice that he gave them.

"Shall I pull out your ship for you, sir?" asked the sergeant.

Ben hesitated a minute, glancing at his watch. "No, I'll use Larry's. Start her up, while I get my helmet."

As he stepped into headquarters, Larry Darstall pulled off his own helmet and held it in his hand. It was almost brand new; the leather was smooth and flexible,

its light tan barely sprinkled with oil specks, and the fur lining clean and soft. Yet when Ben returned, the younger man looked with envious admiration at his C.O.

Ben's helmet was old and ragged, and cut the way they used to make them in 1916, low in the back of the neck. Some of the seams were splitting, the flap had been torn by a bullet and badly mended with a piece of string, and the buckle was bent. The fur lining was mangy and worn, and the leather was so soaked with oil and exhaust fumes and powder grit that it fairly crackled.

"Gee, that's a swell helmet, Ben," asserted Larry.

"Huh!" grunted the C.O. "Bout time I got a new one, eh?" He struggled with the buckle as he slid down into the cockpit of Number 5; over the rumble of the motor he shouted, "Watch, now!"

Then he gunned the eager Spad to a swirling take-off.

NO sooner was he in the air and climbing for elbow room than Ben realized that he had made a mistake. He should have waited for the sergeant to roll out his own crate. Not that there was anything wrong with this one. The motor purred smooth and powerful, the controls moved glibly in his hand, the rudder responded promptly to the lightest pressure of his toe—but it was Larry's, not his.

Not that Ben couldn't handle it. He could take it off, climb, bank, dive and spiral with perfect ease. But when it came to a maneuver requiring delicacy of touch, split-second timing, that was something else again. And Ben knew it. In his own plane, which fitted him like an old glove, he could do a side-slip landing without using his mind at all—flying purely by instinctive muscular co-ordination. But now he had to stop to think. And stopping to think spoiled everything.

Two hundred meters above the road he put her in a forty-five degree slip and let her drop crab-wise toward the field. Had there been nothing at stake but a landing, he would have played safe and eased out gradually. But he had declared himself on how a side-slip landing should be made, and he could not falter now. "Slip her right down to the last foot—" he had told Larry. So he slipped her right down to the last foot—and then some.

As he kicked her level at the last instant, he felt a faint jar. His right wheel had just flicked the rutted turf, but at fifty miles an hour it was enough to blow the tire. Even as he heard the warning *pop*, the Spad began to settle. His hand applied left stick. She touched, and rolled on one wheel. More and more left stick he gave, as the ship rolled slower and slower, and a bit of right rudder, too. At last, with his hand way over against the wall of the cockpit, he could hold the right wing up no longer. As the weight came down on the flat, he reversed rudder sharply. The plane veered, swooped in a quick half circle, canted dangerously—and dropped back on three points, unhurt.

"Boy, if I could handle a ship like that, I'd be Fonck!" cried Larry, running over to where Ben had cut the motor.

"Rotten!" countered Ben feelingly. "Couldn't have given you a worse exhibition. Lucky I didn't crack up. Next time I'll have sense enough to use my own crate." The mechanic ran up and Ben asked, "What's doing, sergeant?"

The chief rigger jerked his thumb toward headquarters. "I think it's Colonel Kincaid, sir."

"Oh! Yes, I—I saw his car from the air," lied Ben. "Maybe that's what took my mind off flying, eh? All right, give



this ship a new tire, sergeant. And check the landing gear for strain, too."

He strode off quickly toward the Cadillac limousine that stood on the edge of the road, but found Colonel Kincaid, operations chief of 1st Army Air Corps, waiting for him inside his own private cubicle.

"Was that you who just came down in that Spad, Captain?"

Remembering the sloppy show he had just staged, Ben flushed miserably. "Yes, it was, colonel," he admitted. "I was just doing a landing, to show one of the boys something. Not so hot, was it?"

"Listen, Bourke," said the colonel; his tone was kind but firm. "I'm not criticizing your landing. I'm talking about your taking off in the first place. Haven't you received advices from Wing stating that commanding officers are not supposed to fly?"

"Why, yes, sir. Over the Front, I thought that meant. But—"

"Apparently you're one of these men who need something stronger than advice. I'm going to make it a direct order. God, man, haven't you had enough! As I recall, you were over the lines with the British, and then the 94th, for more than a year. Your confirmations stand at sixteen—or is it seventeen? How many times you were shot down I don't know, but I do know that you carry a shrapnel fragment in your leg, and that your left jawbone is mostly silver. And anybody can see that scar on your wrist—oh, you needn't hold it behind you! Hell, Bourke, you've done your part, and more, too, don't you think?"

"I don't see the point of all this," muttered Ben uncomfortably.

"The point is," said the colonel with emphasis, "that you're too valuable a

man to lose. Your experience is an asset that we need for all our green recruits. C.O.'s who combine actual combat records with the ability to command aren't easy to find. For example, think; how many of your own comrades are still alive? What if you go and get yourself killed in combat, or in some silly accident on the field here? That's why we tell our commanding officers to stay on the ground. That's why I'm giving you an order now. From now on, Bourke—except for some emergency, of course—you leave the actual flying to others. Understand?"

Ben fumbled with that twisted buckle, and slowly pulled off his helmet and goggles. "I suppose you're right, colonel. Except in an emergency, of course." He reached up toward a wooden peg in the wall just above his desk, then stayed his hand for a moment. He gazed fondly at that battered, dirty scrap of leather and fur that through long use had taken on the shape of his own head. It had certainly gone through the wars with him; it was an old friend, that helmet. Scarred and worn as it was, he wouldn't exchange it at the quartermaster's for a dozen shiny new ones. With a gesture eloquent of finality, he hung it on the peg, and turned away. "That's that," he said softly.

"Good," nodded the colonel. "I'm glad we understand each other. Now tell me how the 414th is shaping up here."

Ben sat down and quickly went into numerous organization details. His squadron had been in actual existence less than three weeks, and there were many matters of supply and personnel to discuss. While they talked, the cough and mutter of blurping motors came loud to their ears. A patrol was coming in.

THE odd thing about these sounds was the fact that a trained ear could plainly distinguish the noise of two different

types of motor; Hissos, and Liberties. The explanation lay in the fact that the 414th was in the nature of an experiment; what the Wing chief called a double duty squadron. It consisted of both day bombers and pursuit under one head. Twenty D. H.'s occupied the hangars on one side of the field, and as many Spads those on the other. Ben Bourke commanded the works, and a tough assignment it was.

"So, in addition to practice formations and test flights," finished Ben, "we've only been putting on one real raid a day, and those only to Dunlaunte, just across the lines. But I guess the boys are shaken down enough now to start full time assignments."

"That's the stuff, captain. We'll need you. There's a drive due in a short time, and the other day bombers are—well, still crippled. By the way," he added, glancing about him nervously and lowering his voice as if he wished no other ears to hear what he was about to say, "you haven't seen anything of the Spider, have you?"

Ben's expression hardened; an ominous glint came into his eye. "No, we haven't. Not a sign. And I hope—say, what's going on?"

From beyond the flimsy partition came the tramp and shuffle of a number of feet, and a hoarse voice croaking, "Ben! Where's Ben?"

The C. O. jumped up and opened the door leading into the front room of headquarters. He saw a small group of pilots and observers, most of them still wearing helmets—evidently from the patrol that had just landed. In front stood Steve Forster, B Flight leader.

"Hello, Steve. What's the idea of all the racket? Where's—"

He paused abruptly as he noticed the stiff, drawn faces, the eyes that stared at him with an unblinking glassiness. "Say, where's the rest of you? Culley, and Whitfield, and—"

"Culley made a forced landing without a prop," said Steve huskily. "The others are washed out. Two D-H's in flames! Whitty spun into Mont Carque. You'll never hear from him again."

"The hell you say!" cried Ben, paling. He was shocked, as might anyone be at the news of six deaths. But he knew he must not show it. "All right, boys. I know how you feel. So do I. But don't let it get you down. Such things happen. Buck up, Steve, and write your report."

The flight leader, however, made no move toward the log book. He stood staring at Ben as if paralyzed by his thoughts.

"But you don't understand, Ben," he muttered hoarsely. "The Jerries that jumped us—they were *the Spiders!*"

A faint exclamation rasped in the C. O.'s throat. Then he too seemed for a moment to be paralyzed. There was a complete silence in the room as he returned Steve Forster's rigid stare. When someone's foot grated on the floor, it sounded like thunder.

"Steve!" hissed Ben. He gripped the other man's elbow so hard that Steve winced. "Are you sure?"

The flight leader recoiled from his tone. "We all saw that marking, plain as day, Ben. You could hardly mistake it, you know."

Ben dropped his hand. By an effort he regained self-control.

"That's right, Steve. I suppose you're right. Go on down to mess, and get yourself a drink—all of you. To hell with the log book. Don't write up anything about this. Not yet, anyway. Go on."

When they had filed through the outer door, he turned back to his own office. The expression on Colonel Kincaid's face

was enough to tell Ben instantly that he had heard it all.

"The Spider!" he muttered, shaking his head.

"The Spider!" echoed Ben, dropping into his chair. "Tell me, colonel, just what do you think this means?"

"It has meant virtual destruction for bombing squadrons, in the past." Again the colonel lowered his voice and leaned across the desk. "You might as well know the worst, Bourke. I'll give you the whole story. This German's name is Heinrich von Speidar. He evidently knows enough English to recognize the similarity in sound, so he

uses the insignia of a spider on his planes. He's been flying a long time, and has commanded his own staffel for about a year. It is said that he had a brother who was killed in a day bombing raid in Flanders, last February. Ever since he has sworn particular vengeance on bombers."

"But why is it he's so feared?" demanded Ben.

"Because he concentrates all his attentions on one squadron at a time. Take the 86th, last month, for example. They were raiding in the Toul sector. The Spider staffel was flying that region every day, but they never attacked anyone except the patrols of the 86th. Each day they brought down at least one; some days several. Well, that sort of thing has a cumulative effect, you know; it begins to shatter the morale. It's like a drip of water wearing away a mountain; you begin to get the feeling that sooner or later you're doomed. The casualties in the 86th mounted to nearly 80%; then the replacements became infected with the terror and mutinied—refused to fly! It was



necessary to break up the squadron—wipe it out of existence—and distribute the personnel among other outfits. By the way, you've got one here, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied Ben slowly. "Steve Forster."

"That's bad. Try to keep him from talking, Bourke. It's the effect on the spirits of the pilots that is most disastrous. Once they get to thinking, telling themselves that the Spider has marked them for victims, it's hopeless. You've got to keep up the morale of your men, captain. That's the only way to face this situation. I suppose this Boche is a pretty good flyer—the communiques set his record at something like 33. But he can't be superhuman, damn him! Just a murdering devil, and there's no trick too low for him to stoop to, they tell me."

Ben said nothing. The colonel rose. "Keep your pilots peped up, captain. Don't let them lose confidence. Anyway, perhaps it was a mistake, this afternoon. Your men may have been mistaken. Or the Spider patrol may have merely attacked at random, not meaning to pick on the 414th deliberately. Perhaps you'll never run into them again."

CHAPTER THREE

Orders for Aces

IT WAS not a mistake, however, as the next three days showed beyond possibility of doubt. The 414th was flying regular schedule now; three and sometimes four patrols a day, each one made up of D. H.'s carrying a load of bombs and an escort of at least half a dozen Spads. With no exceptions, every patrol was attacked by Fokkers, and those Fokkers always bore the same insignia. The Yanks who saw that marking and returned alive to tell of it described it with a shudder.

There was a circle of solid jet black on

the upper half of the fuselage, surrounding the cockpit. That represented the body. From it, extending down on both sides, were painted a number of long, hairy, loathsome legs. The effect was much too life-like to be pleasant. And when, during those three days, those attacks carved a casualty total of more than a dozen in the ranks of the 414th, the effect on the morale of Ben's pilots was not life-like; it was death-like!

On the morning of the fourteenth, Ben stepped out of headquarters into a swirl of noise and dust and commotion. From down by the last hangar a group of bombers were taking off, the big D. H.'s gathering speed slowly across the wide drome and, one by one, lifting their heavy loads of steel and H. E. into a gradual climb over the far trees. Nearer to him, the protecting patrol of Spads was preparing to follow; props flashed in the sun, and pilots were vaulting into cockpits.

A puzzled frown appeared on the C. O.'s brow. Five Spads stood there on the dead-line, and altogether there were five helmeted figures in sight. Yet only four of those props were turning over. How come? He walked quickly over toward the first plane.

"Steve!" He raised his voice above the stuttering mutter of the exhausts. "This is B Flight's strafe, isn't it? I thought you told me you had five on deck?"

Steve Forster, leaning against the side of his ship, looked sullen. "I did. I had it fixed up to borrow one man from C Flight. But Larry Darstall isn't going."

"Larry? Why not? Some trouble with his ship?"

"No. He says he's sick."

"Sick?" Ben turned quickly to the man who seemed to be trying to get out of sight behind a wing. "What's the matter, Larry?"

"Oh—I'm all right. That is—I guess I had a bit too much last night—cognac,

I mean. I feel sort of queer; my head is dizzy, you know what I mean? It'll go away, I suppose. But right now I—I don't feel like flying—just this patrol, Ben—"

The C. O. regarded him with imperfectly concealed surprise. Never before had he known Larry Darstall, a picture of health, to confess to a hangover. Furthermore, Ben himself had joined the poker game in the barracks the night before, by way of observing first hand the spirits of his men, and he knew for a fact that Larry had not taken more than two drinks all evening. What was he doing now, gold-bricking? Incredible! Larry was not that type at all.

Suddenly a slight change passed over Ben's face, and he made a beckoning gesture with his head. "Come inside a minute, Larry. The rest of you fellows wait."

With the pilot at his heels, Ben entered headquarters. He led the way direct to the private cubby-hole which was his office, closed the door and dropped into his chair.

"All right, Larry, what's at the bottom of this?"

The other hesitated. He shifted nervously from one foot to the other, glanced from side to side as if seeking a means of escape, then rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other. At last he met Ben's eyes and spoke in an unnatural whisper.

"I—I had a dream last night, Ben."

"A dream!" Ben looked more astonished than ever. After a moment he laughed shortly. "And what did you dream, Larry?"

"I dreamt I was in a plane, flying. My own plane. I don't know where; I was alone." As he spoke, the young pilot seemed gradually to recover his voice. His words came faster, shot through with a vivid remembrance. "I happened to look down, inside the cockpit. On my knee I saw a—a spider! I brushed it off with my hand, quickly. But where it had been a little spurt of flame shot up, like a scratched match. I tried to beat it out, but more spiders were crawling up my legs. As fast as I knocked them off, others came! And where each one touched me there was a tongue of fire! I screamed, beat at them. But they came thicker and faster. They were all over me. The flames were in my face, suffocating me. I tried to jump out, but I was strapped in and couldn't move. I shrieked, and twisted—the fire was in my mouth, my eyes! It was horrible! Then I woke up—"

He ended, panting through lips livid at the memory.

"So-o-o," said Ben, very slowly and calmly. He fixed the pilot with his eye. "You know what that means, don't you, Larry?"

"Yes," answered Larry in a shaking gasp. "It means that I'm going to die!"

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It's a sign that the Spider is going to get me! I'm going to burn, like Bob and Shep—and the others! God, I know it! I—"

"**Y**OUR'E crazy!" Ben's words cut like a knife through the other's torrent of agonized phrases. "It doesn't mean that at all, and you know it. Or you would know it, if you'd only use your brain. All it means is that you've heard a story about a German called the Spider. You've heard the other boys talking about him a lot lately. You've thought about him and you've thought about the fellows who were shot down in flames. The result is that spiders are so impressed on your mind that you dream about them, that's all. See?"

Larry, sweating profusely, shook his head.

"It's more than that. This wasn't like any other dream. It was too *real*, Ben! I can't describe it. Even after I woke up, I could still feel the things crawling on me!" He shuddered.

"All right, Larry. I believe you—it seemed realistic. But for God's sake, use some sense! You don't mean to tell me that you believe any of this bunk about dreams being a warning of the future?"

The pilot stared fixedly at the toe of his shoe. "Shep had a dream like that, the night before he was killed."

With an impatient gesture the C. O. rose. He laid his arm across Larry's shoulder and tried to talk calmly, persuasively. He confessed frankly that the German ace, von Speidar, was a tough antagonist to meet, and that his reputation was fearsome. But he pointed out

that no man was invincible; that other great aces, after running up long strings of victories, had finally been conquered. He scoffed at the superstitious angle; finally he resorted to using the first person plural.

"Look, Larry, we've got to break this thing up. Pretty soon everybody will start dreaming about the Spider, and then what? The scaly Boche will have frightened us out of the sky with his shadow. We mustn't let the boys get the idea that we take it seriously. If you don't fly this patrol, they'll all know why. You've got to go, prove that you're not afraid. Don't you see?"

Larry was still shaking his head weakly. "But I *am* afraid, Ben. I'll never come back alive—I know it!"

"Damn it, Larry, you will come back! I promise you! Why, I'm so sure you'll come back that—here, wait a minute!"

He turned and snatched something from a peg on the wall. "Look! That's my helmet. Every flight I ever made I made in that helmet. It's been through a hundred battles; look at the scars. There's nothing in the world I'd hate to lose more than that hunk of leather. Here, take it—wear it. And give it to me when you get back!"

Larry found the old helmet thrust forcibly into his hand. He took it, glanced at it, and then gazed strickenly at the C. O. His eyes were beseeching, ashamed, and defiant all at the same time.

"Thanks, Ben. But I—I can't—" The C. O. turned away in despair. His shoulders stiffened, and when he again faced the pilot his features were grim and stern.

"Larry, you force me to do it. If you came to me and asked to be excused from



a patrol for any other reason, I'd say yes before you even got through asking me. But this thing has got to be spiked before it gets contagious. Larry, I order you to fly this patrol—and I'm coming along myself to see that you obey that order."

The pilot swayed on his feet, and seemed for an instant on the verge of falling. But then he got a grip on himself, and slowly straightened up to his full height. That was a direct command; for an officer in the army there was but one possible response. His face was ashen, and the hand he raised to his forehead trembled violently.

"Yes, sir," he choked, and turned on his heel abruptly.

He was no sooner out the door than Ben started forward with a recall on his lips. But he halted, grinding his teeth. No, by God! He had to stick to it now. The order was given, and he was right in giving it.

He turned to reach for his helmet, forgetting for the moment that he had given it to Larry. Then he hurried outside, and while his own Spad was being rolled out and warmed up, he stepped to the supply cupboard and donned a new headgear. Walking back toward his plane, it felt strange and unfamiliar on his head, and seemed somehow to be related to the unpleasant forebodings that weighed on his mind.

The D-H's were all in the air by now, circling impatiently. A wave of his hand sent the other Spad pilots, including Larry, racing across the field to take off, and a few seconds later Ben was in his cockpit, reaching a steady hand for his own throttle.

As he climbed rapidly to take the leader's position at the head of the V, his thoughts were in an angry turmoil. His

position, his responsibilities, weighed heavily on his mind.

He wished fervently that he were again nothing but a pilot, and could simply plunge into battle without stopping to think. A man's imagination was his worst enemy; it was when he stopped to think that calamity caught up with him. His

jaw stiffened. He must turn his thoughts, and those of his men, in a different direction. Whatever happened today, Larry Darstall must be alive when this patrol returned!

He did not expect to get back without trouble of some kind and he was not disappointed. He saw the Fokkers before crossing the lines. The raid was headed for Poulons, a village ten miles in Germany, and it was almost as if the Germans had guessed their objective in advance. They could not have taken up a better position for attack.

There were nine of them in a tight formation, a couple of miles to the east of Ben's course—which gave them the sun at their backs—and about a thousand meters higher. They were bound to spot the raiders, and their numbers promised trouble. For a moment Ben hesitated, but then his spine stiffened again. No, he must not shun combat now. That would confess his fears and defeat his every purpose.

In two groups the Spads and the D-H's droned across No-Man's Land and bored deeper into Germany. For what seemed like a long time the Fokkers made no move, floating up there serenely against the blue, but always just within striking distance. The two-seaters neared Poulons, and began to fan out to distribute their fiery loads. To a casual glance that village was nothing but battered heaps of dust, but certain tell-tale scratches on



photographic plates had made G.H.G. suspect, and rightly, that it was a feeding point for ammunition trucks. So the D-H's swooped low, and the earth began to heave and vomit as the projectiles fell. At that moment the Fokkers made a sharp turn, stood on their noses, and came screaming down.

BUT Ben was not caught off guard, nor did he make the obvious move. Instead of turning away, he turned his formation toward the enemy, cutting back in underneath their dive. This forced them to twist in mid-drop, a difficult feat for a lot of planes in a group. Some did it better than others, but by the time the tracers began to cut the air, the Boche had been effectively broken out of formation. A half dozen individual duels were immediately at white heat. He must watch Larry.

He saw Larry's number 5 in the middle of a whirl of wings, then lost it as a Fokker cut between. A moment later he spotted the other Spad again, this time zooming toward a black-crossed tail. Apparently Larry was more than holding his own, whereas Ben himself—as he discovered to his sudden dismay—was in a jam.

He felt rather than heard a faint, long *r-r-rip* as a handful of bullets tore the length of his fuselage. His stick slapped over, and his eyes swiveled to the rear. A square nose leered at him, vomiting smoky streaks that stabbed the air close to his head. He cartwheeled into a vertical dive, made the Spad twist like a snake, and then abruptly pulled up into a zoom. The Fokker could out-zoom him, but that twist had upset its pilot's touch. Ben slanted a sharp quick burst upward into a dark-hued belly. The Fokker slipped off and began to spin, very rapidly. Too rapidly to be involuntary, Ben suspected. But he turned his attention elsewhere without pursuing.

He found a slanting plume of greasy black smoke in the sky that ended at its lower tip in a plummeting Fokker. And some distance away he sighted Larry in a tight spiral, back to back with a foe, locked in an even struggle.

But some warning instinct made Ben lift his eyes, and his muscles contracted abruptly. From far overhead a lone plane was plunging down in a long, straight line! At terrific, incalculable speed it hurtled downward—straight toward that battling pair!

Ben roared a curse. He should have guessed this! The trick was not new, but it was just the type of maneuver the Spider was capable of. To wait up above until the dogfight was in full blast; to pick a victim already intent on one opponent, and then to strike like forked lightning—that was how this great German ace made his record bulge!

Ben whirled on a wing-tip, motor thundering. His charging Spad ate up the distance, but it could not equal the dizzy velocity of that long-sustained dive. Larry was still locked in the spiral, eyes on his own antagonist. Ben slammed his rudder, seized his trigger grips. His guns belched a hot burst across the path of the careening Fokker, but the range was impossible. He saw the Spandaus sputtered and a hopeless cry tore from his throat.

"Larry, look out!—My God!"

Spad Number 5 leaped out of its bank as a salmon leaps from mid-stream. The Fokker, its volley delivered to the mark, sheered off smartly, still dropping like a stone. Ben shot past, above, his angle of approach making pursuit futile. He whipped at once into a *reversement*, but as he roared over into a plunge he cursed again.

Von Speidar's Fokker, instead of staying to fight, was stretching its dive out into a long, fast power glide, racing off into

Germany. As if this had been a signal, the other Boches immediately broke off combat and followed suit. In no more than a few seconds the battle was ended, leaving the Spads milling about each other as if wondering dazedly what had happened to their foes. The D. H.'s, their errand finished, chewed air toward the lines.

Ben was staring anxiously downward. Far below, a Spad descended in wide, even circles; Spad Number 5. His dismay lessened when he saw that Larry's ship was not on fire and seemed to be under complete control. Apparently it suffered only from a crippled motor, and Larry was facing no worse than a forced landing with a dead stick.

There was a field within its reach; a field large enough to roll a Spad in, if the pilot's hand were steady. Ben hovered, watching closely from four thousand feet. The banking wings below straightened out, now; Larry was gliding. Ben could not tell the exact instant when it landed, but then he saw that the Spad was coming to a halt, safe on the ground. He watched a tiny figure spring out of the cockpit, and quite plainly saw the wave of an arm.

A leaden hand seemed to release its grip on his heart. Four Spads converged on his flanks, and he led them on the trail of the bombers back across the lines. Ten minutes later they were dropping one by one to the tarmac of the 414th.

He waited until they were all down, then curtly requested the pilots to follow him into headquarters. When they had crowded into his tiny office, puffing at nervous cigarettes, he spoke sharply.

"You fellows knew about Larry not wanting to go on this patrol, didn't you? The reason, I mean?" Their heads nodded slowly. "Well, you saw what happened to him, didn't you?"

Steve Forster wiped his lips and spoke

gruffly. "Yes—the Spider shot him down, just as he thought."

"But he wasn't killed, was he?" snapped Ben. "You all saw him land safe and get out of his ship, didn't you? Kinda looks like the Spider isn't such sure death, after all. In fact, when you come to figure up, we got two of the Spider's Fokkers decisively, and all he scored is one prisoner. No one is going to miss Larry around here more than I am, but just the same I'd be willing to exchange casualties with the Spider on *that* basis all winter. We can lick the pants off that guy."

For a short time, things seemed better. The atmosphere around the drome was more cheerful. Spirits improved, voices were raised above a dull monotone. The outcome of the morning's patrol, and Ben's words, had a tonic effect. But only for a short time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hostage from Hell

AT NOON, C Flight returned from a raid in the western end of the sector. That is—half of the C Flight returned. The others were charred and smouldering wrecks, somewhere on the west bank of the Meuse. Three Spads and two D. H.'s wiped out in ten minutes of furious, fiery murder—and the spirit of the survivors so shattered that they could hardly tell the tale intelligibly! Whether they had encountered the same formation, or a different one, no one could tell. But their assailants had all been branded with the dread mark of the Spider.

At seven that evening, the third and last patrol of the day came in. As luck would have it, 'A' Flight had reached Moularde and returned without sighting a single enemy plane. The pilots, snatching at cigarettes, hurried down the path toward the mess shack. Ben paused in

the door of headquarters for a moment before following them.

He took one step when he heard a shout. One of the mechanics was pointing. In the murky gray sky a form was taking shape; the shape of a Fokker. In the half darkness of dusk it was already very close, headed straight for the field.

Ben started to run toward the hangars, and he shouted an order that went unheard in the sudden confusion. The Fokker was almost over his head. He turned toward headquarters, where a Colt lay on his desk, but then he halted. He had a premonition of what this meant, and when he peered upward saw that he was not mistaken. A dim, indistinguishable object floated in the air just beneath the German plane, wafting slowly downward. Immediately the Fokker zoomed, veered sharply toward the north, and disappeared into the gloom as swiftly as it had come.

A mechanic brought him the tubular message container and the small silken chute to which it was attached. A dozen pilots, streaming up from the barracks, were at his heels as he entered headquarters. Here he unfolded the stiff paper inside the tube and held it near a candle. There was a tense, anxious silence until he had finished.

"Here, read it out loud, will you, Steve?"

The leader of B Flight took the paper from Ben's hand and began to read very slowly, as if intent on not missing a single word.

Captain Bourke, Squadron 414.

Your Lieutenant Darstall is safe in my hands, which no doubt you are glad to hear! It seems he has an article which he desires very much to place in your hands. We like to extend these little courtesies, so I have decided to accommodate him. Tomorrow, at three o'clock, I shall return your helmet. A Halberstadt biplane will cross the lines at Sergeaux, and fly direct to your field, alone. Allow me to warn you—do not molest this plane, for the passenger in the rear cockpit,

which unfortunately has no belt, will be your comrade, and the first maneuver of defense will naturally be a loop. You understand?

Heinrich von Speidur,
Kommandant, Imperial Staffel 60.

After a moment of incredulous silence, a babel of cries and questions broke out. Ben answered the latter by explaining how Larry had been wearing his helmet. Some of the pilots were angry, some suspicious, some puzzled. Not one took the German's words at their face value. Why should the Spider take any risk to return a helmet? There was a trick in it somewhere. He wasn't coming at all—he wouldn't have Larry with him—he would be accompanied by a score of Fokkers, ready to do battle! Ben's voice cut like a whiplash across the excited din.

"Drop it! Wait till tomorrow; we'll find out then what he means. If there's a trick up his sleeve, he won't find us asleep. Every man of you will be ready to take the air at two-forty. 'A' and 'C' Flights will circle above the field, high; about ten thousand. 'B' Flight will go with me to Sergeaux. If he really has Larry with him, we won't touch him, of course. But as quick as he pulls anything queer—jump him! If it's some kind of a trap, I'll let off a red flare, and the other two flights can join in. But don't fire a shot, anybody, until you see that flare. In the meantime, forget it. Let's go down to mess."

Shortly after two-thirty the next afternoon, he sent 'A' and 'C' Flights into the air, after repeating instructions to them a second time. If any Fokkers appeared anywhere, they were to attack at once; there had been nothing in the note about leaving other planes alone. Otherwise, they were to take no action unless they saw a red flare from Ben.

A few minutes later Ben himself, with 'B' Flight on his heels, gunned his Spad

off the drome and wheeled in wide climbing turns like a gull rising from the water. He was ahead of time, and knew it. But he could stand it no longer to stay on the ground and wait. *Anything* was better than that. He led the way toward the lines, but a couple of miles short of the rendezvous swung off to the east, cruising alertly at five thousand feet. Then after a bit he reversed his course, to head once more toward the unsightly pile of rubbish which was Sergeaux.

He saw the Fokkers first. They loomed out of the northwest in a perfect V, pointed straight at Sergeaux. His fingers twitched against his trigger grips, and his eyes narrowed. Then, dropping his eyes, he saw the single plane far below them, parallelling their course. A Halberstadt, no doubt about it. His other hand moved toward the Very pistol.

But then, looking up again, he saw that the Fokker formation was turning. With a wide sweep they banked away from the lines, and soared back toward the river. But the Halberstadt came on, alone.

As it crossed the lines, Ben throttled his motor and slid down in a curving glide. Closer and closer he edged, until he sat above its flank in a position where he could peer down into both cockpits. The German plane never swerved, though the goggled face of the pilot stared up at him

nervously. But Ben was interested in the rear seat.

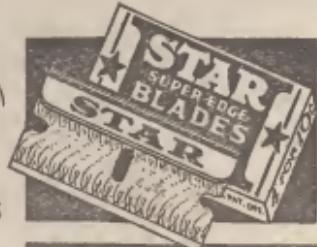
There was no question about that being Larry. He wore neither helmet nor goggles, so his features, his curly dark hair, were unmistakable. He, too, kept looking up and back, but when Ben waved a hand Larry made no move in reply. Then Ben saw that the captive's hands were bound together behind his back, and a closer look showed rope about his knees as well, though there was no belt to hold him in the plane. Ben growled in his throat; the Boches were taking no chances whatsoever.

Larry's head kept wagging from side to side, and jerking up and down in crude gestures; his mouth opened and closed continually. Apparently he was striving to get a shouted word or two across that trivial distance, through the blatant thunder of many hundred horsepower. Though Ben throttled his motor momentarily, it was impossible to hear a whisper. But a sudden misgiving struck him. Was Larry trying to warn him, trying to tell him something?

HE turned to search the sky behind and above with a long, keen look. No, the Fokkers were practically out of sight. There were no other German planes to be seen. The Halberstadt was all alone, except for the Spads that overshadowed it,

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and it was winging deeper and deeper into Allied territory every second. In another few mintes the drome of the 414th came into sight ahead. Ben seized his stick a little tighter, and canted down still closer to the German plane.

The Boche veered slightly, to pass to the west of the field. Ben and the others of 'B' Flight veered with him. Far up above a dozen more Spads waited, wheeling like watchful vultures.

Ben caught a sudden brief flash of movement below the belly of the Halberstadt. Something was dropping. The wing of the German plane, and then his own wing, got in between, so that he could not follow its fall. But there, a little lower, he thought he saw a flicker of white that must be a message chute. "There goes the helmet," he thought. And suddenly the Spad heaved and bucked as if striking a heavy sea.

Even through the din of all those exhausts he heard the roar of that explosion. It did not reach him until several seconds after the unaccountable jouncing of his ship, so by that time he was staring downward. He saw the whole front end of 'A' Hangar, together with headquarters shack leaning against it, rising into the air, where the whole dissolved into a million fragments to be swallowed in a huge cloud of boiling smoke. In another instant the smoke hid the field completely.

"You rat!" grated Ben in fury, and nosed his plane over toward the Halberstadt. His mouth was distorted with rage and hate, his eyes blazed, his hand trembled on the trigger grips.

Ben gulped a deep breath, but no; he couldn't do it. He knew he couldn't do

it! The German—damn his wily soul—had known it, too, before he ever started. No doubt the German was laughing at him now, and flying serenely on toward home.

Ben pulled his Spad aside, and looked about him. The others had dropped close on his flanks, waiting and watching. If he fired, they were ready to fire too. But he couldn't do it. And neither could they. Not one of them would deliberately murder a comrade. And they all knew that a single shot meant certain death for Larry Darstell.

Yet the tarmac behind them was now a gory shambles. Only one bomb had fallen, but it was a big one, and had been aimed with unhurried care. It had practically wiped out of existence squadron headquarters, together with 'A' Hangar, and the hurtling fragments had claimed nearly a hundred casualties among the unsuspecting ground crews. Only the fact that Ben had taken his entire scout force into the air had saved the destruction of a dozen Spads and the lives of their pilots.



With a bitter curse on his lips, and his mind racked by a torment of indecision, Ben trailed the lone Halberstadt toward the lines. The thought of the dead and wounded on his own drome appalled him, and his fingers itched on the triggers, even though he realized that to slaughter this single German now would be only an empty gesture of revenge. But suddenly another aspect of the situation struck him. Having once used his live captive as a human shield, with easy success, what would prevent the Spider from doing the same thing again? If Larry's comrades of the 414th were humane enough to lay off a plane in which he was

a helpless passenger, this same diabolic strategem could be repeated over and over, until the entire drome was reduced to a heap of smoking ashes. And the Spider was just the one to do it.

Ben saw one possible chance—desperately risky, calling for hair-line accuracy, but possible. He steeled his nerves and steadied his hand. Even if it meant the death of Larry Darstall, he had to do it. It meant the lives of untold hundreds, perhaps, in the future.

Cruising along by the side of the watchful German, he let his Spad gradually lose a hundred feet or so of altitude. Then abruptly he pulled up, until his nose pointed toward the high clouds, and his guns rattled off a smoking burst of tracers.

The Boche pilot, alert, had seen nothing above to call for a volley. But his natural reaction was to look. He threw back his head and stared up in the direction Ben was firing.

Instantly Ben's Spad dropped off, whipped through a quarter turn to the left, and pointed square across the path of the Halberstadt. He had only a second before the Jerry got wise, and he dared not miss. His fingers contracted a second time on the triggers, and his controls jockeyed the sights into precise position. This burst was short; hardly a dozen shots in all, but they drilled the German motor from side to side without coming near the cockpits. The exhausts coughed black smoke, and the prop spun feebly to a dead stop.

The pilot's first instinctive reaction as his motor died was to shove forward on the stick. The Halberstadt started to nose down. But then he remembered his passenger and the promised retaliation. He hauled back on his controls again, but al-

ready it was too late. There was no plane on the Front that could loop without a motor to pull it up and over. The Halberstadt zoomed up to a steep angle, hung for a moment, and fell off weakly. Then it was in a glide.

As it wheeled downward, steering for a patch of open ground, Ben trailed it closely, his heart in his mouth. Larry was

still unscathed, but would the Boche crash deliberately now? No, he thought not. Only a superman deliberately commits suicide to carry out a threat.

With precise skill, the German pilot wheeled, banked, and set the two-seater down in a perfect dead-stick landing. This was allied territory, and Ben, closing his throttle, slipped quickly down toward the same field. With one eye on his own landing and the other on the Halberstadt, he dropped toward the earth.

But even before his wheels touched, he was horrified to see what was happening. As the Halberstadt rolled to a stop, the pilot jumped out. In his hand was a brass barrelled pistol. Without a moment's hesitation he raised it, pointed the muzzle under the cowl, and fired a hissing flare into the gas-soaked fabric. A gush of flame licked up—and Larry was still a bound and helpless prisoner in the rear seat!

BEN wagged rudder and ailerons savagely in desperate efforts to make his Spad lose speed. His undercarriage jounced, and hit a second time; then he was on the ground. Still travelling at forty miles an hour, Ben slapped his belt open and pushed himself up. On his right, a short, gray-clad figure was running swiftly. On his left the Halberstadt was quickly turning into a fiery torch. A single cry of fearful agony reached his ears. He



sprang to the ground, running at top speed.

The flame and smoke were welling up, so that already the central portion of the plane was hidden. At any instant the tank would let go. He could not see the cockpit, and there was no time to mount the step and lift a man out through the top. Ben simply charged full into the side of the ship, as a fullback charges into a line. Head and shoulders burst through charring canvas, and his gloved hands were clawing in the rear cockpit. He seized what he touched first—it happened to be a leg—and hurled himself backward with all his strength.

There was a crackling, ripping sound; the figure of Larry came out in his grasp, carrying the whole side of the fuselage with it. A sheet of flame puffed in Ben's face, scorching his cheeks. Strangling, he toppled to his knees. Then he was crawling, dragging his burden after him. An awful hissing roar that told of the bursting tank urged him on, and he did not stop until a hundred feet of safety separated him from the raging holocaust.

By the time he had ripped loose the bonds from wrists and ankles, Larry recovered his power of speech. The young pilot's eyebrows were gone, his hair was singed almost down to his skull, and his face and neck were deeply gashed where Ben had dragged him through the splintered wall of the fuselage. But he had escaped serious burns by a fraction of a second, and he was mad clear through.

He stunned Ben with a series of blistering curses, and ended by demanding, "Why in hell didn't you shoot sooner?"

"Damn it—I saw you in there, and the note said—"

"It wouldn't have made any difference, Ben! I was yelling at you to fire, but you couldn't hear me, of course. I was slated to die, anyway. I heard the instructions. When the Halberstadt was met at the lines, on the way back, by the Spider's

Fokkers, the pilot had orders to loop then and there, regardless of what you had done earlier. That's the Spider's conception of 'All's fair in war'!"

Ben seized his elbow. "You mean to say that wasn't the Spider himself, in the Halberstadt?"

"Hell, no! Just one of his—What's that?"

A scattered burst of rifle fire rang out from beyond the trees at the far edge of the field. They both sprang up and ran toward the sound. In a few minutes they came upon a squad of infantry.

"He wouldn't stop when I hailed, so we nailed him," explained a hard-boiled sergeant. "He must've thought he was Houdini, eh?"

Ben knelt by the huddled, bleeding corpse and felt in the pockets. The name on the identity card was, of course, not Heinrich von Speidar. He rose, shaking his head in bitter disappointment. The Spider, then, was still alive, and more to be dreaded than ever.

He sent the sergeant for an ambulance to carry Larry back to the field; then he returned to his Spad. Several minutes later he descended in a swift curve to land on a tarmac now rendered hideous. A huge gaping crater marked the site of headquarters; the portion of 'A' hangar still standing was blackened by flames. All of the other hangars, and even the barracks, were scarred by flying junks of steel; loose dirt had been scattered over everything.

The other Spads had already landed. Their pilots stood about, staring with horrified eyes and twitching lips at the scene, muttering incoherent curses as they watched the mechanics try to piece together whole bodies out of scattered, mangled limbs. Ben saw instantly that they were all on the verge of a nervous collapse.

"Come on, snap out of it!" he barked at them. "Turn your ships around and start

them up; don't you know a patrol has to take off in five minutes? Yes, every damned one of you!"

Actually there had been no patrol scheduled, nor had Ben thought of sending one out until this very minute. But he proceeded to give detailed instructions, hurried them into their cockpits, and practically drove them off the ground by force of will. He knew that a prompt trip over the lines was the best thing to cure their jitters.

Once they were all in the air, he went to work himself to pull order out of chaos. He located the severed ends of the telephone wires, hunted up a spare instrument among the supplies, and hooked it up. Squatting in the open on the wreck of what had once been his own cot, he got a connection through to Colonel Kincaid.

"Why, the dirty so-and-so!" growled the colonel, after Ben had finished describing what had happened. "But look here; this man Darstall. He was on the Spider's field; he must know where it's located, then. Could he point it out to you on the map?"

Ben had a premonition of what was coming. "Why, yes, I suppose so. He's on his way here now. But—"

"Get him to show you, the minute he arrives," continued the colonel excitedly. "That's the best dope we've picked up in a month. We've never gotten a line on

where that devil's drome is, up to now. If Darstall can tell you definitely, call me back at once. The thing to do is to strike, and strike fast. We'll show that Boche he's not the only one who can drop bombs. I'll be waiting for your call, captain."

Ben dropped the receiver, and was staring blankly at the ground when a mechanic trotted up with something in his hand.

"I just found this, sir. On the roof of the hangar. It must have come down right after the bomb."

The chute was only a charred wisp of silk, but the message tube was intact. Ben drew out the stiff sheet of paper anxiously.

Captain Bourke.

On second thought, I have decided to keep your helmet. It fits me very comfortably, and will doubtless last longer in my possession than in yours. Instead, I have sent you a token of my regard, more suitable for a soldier, which I trust you have enjoyed receiving. Believe me, it will not be the last—

Carefully, Ben tore the paper into four pieces, ignited them with a match, and watched them burn to ashes. He never mentioned the note to anyone, neither to his own men nor to Colonel Kincaid, when he phoned him again, an hour later.

The raid on the Spider's drome was set for seven in the morning.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Date with Death

IN the dull gray light that followed a late dawn, the mechanics were lining up the ships of the 414th and preparing to spin the props. The D. H.'s that had suffered only light damages had been hastily repaired overnight; altogether, seventeen of the two big-seaters stood ready, their racks loaded with hundred-pound detonation bombs. The full force of Spads were grouped at the western corner of the tarmac, where the pilots, unaware as yet of their destination, milled about restlessly.

Ben plodded up from the mess tent with heavy steps. His own quarters having been destroyed, he had slept that night on a few blankets spread on the kitchen floor. Not that a little discomfort made much difference; he could not have slept soundly in any event. For he was facing, this morning, the toughest moment of his career. He was in the harrowing position of a commanding officer about to give an order which he is uncertain whether his men will obey or not. With grim forebodings he forced his lagging feet to carry him up to the tarmac.

At his curt gesture, the pilots surrounded him in a quiet circle. All wore leather coats, but only a few had pulled on their helmets. Many were dragging nervously at cigarettes. With drawn and rigid expressions they listened while he told them bluntly of their objective.

"You know well enough what this particular Boche outfit has done to us, and to others. Well, this is our chance to even the score. In an hour from now, if every man does his part, no one will ever have to fear the Spider again. It's squarely up to us!"

He had not expected enthusiasm, or eagerness. But not a man moved. They stared at him blankly, or cast uncertain

glances at each other; several shrugged, and muttered disquietingly.

He went on brusquely.

"Larry noticed something on that field. All their ships have identical insignia—except one! That one has a round black eye painted on each side of the motor cowling. It's easy to guess that that Fokker must belong to von Speider himself, the staffel leader. If that plane gets into the air, *it's going down!* All right, boys, that's all. The motors are turning over. Let's go!"

Ben could feel the blood drain from his face, leaving it white. This was the critical moment. Would they fail him now?

What if they did? What could he do or say? Mere words, a pep talk, would never swing them now. This situation demanded some startling incident, some psychological twist to precipitate action.

He looked at them, trying not to betray his doubts. A few were pulling on their helmets hesitantly, but most of them had not moved. They only shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, staring at him in sullen defiance, their faces gaunt and stony.

Suddenly there was a pluck at his elbow.

"Which ship—! You!" he cried. "Why,

He turned quickly, to see Larry Darstall.

"Which ship—. You!" he cried. "Why, you can't fly! What are you talking about?"

Larry's head was wrapped in bandages, making a helmet both unnecessary and impossible to get on. That part of his face which was exposed was criss-crossed with adhesive. His left arm bulged where a splint had been bound under the sleeve.

"I won't be much help," he said quietly. "But I'd like to be along to see it, when the Spider goes down."

For a moment Ben could not drag his

eyes away from the man before him. Then he turned to the crowd of pilots. But no word from him was necessary. Larry was enough. That was all they needed. Ben could almost hear the indrawn breath hiss between their teeth. In a few seconds they were transformed from a herd of fear-drugged, broken spirits into a mob of angry pilots, eager to redeem themselves.

Their throats emitted a low growl. They turned as a body to dash for their cockpits, as if they couldn't wait to get in the air. They began yelling at each other, angrily, to hurry.

In his haste to get off the ground with them, Ben lost track of Larry. He did not see the young fellow halt a recent replacement by tripping him as he ran, nor hear Larry say, "If you want to tell your grandchildren you were in on this show, you'll have to get the greaseballs to roll out another ship. I'm using this one."

BEN held 'B' Flight back with the main formation until they reached the lines. Then he waggled his wings, opened his throttle wide, and with four others raced into Germany. Bit by bit they drew ahead of the rest, held down to the cruising speed of the loaded D. H.'s, until the larger group was only a cloud of specks behind. By that time Ben could see the drome in the road fork, ahead.

Whether news of their coming had been phoned from the lines or not he could not tell. But there were a lot of Fokkers in front of those hangars, and they were lined up as if ready to take off. He shoved his nose down and began to gain still more speed in a roaring power glide. If all of those planes took the air, the D. H.'s would suffer heavy casualties! But that was what Ben was here to forestall.

The Boches must have had binoculars on him, for as his dive steepened passing a thousand feet, several of the Fokkers began to roll. From a mile away he angled left a little, putting his nose on the far

edge of the field. When the first dark-hued wing swept across that edge, his fingers crept about his grips, and he calculated distances sharply.

The Fokker banked and wheeled and squirmed, trying desperately to get out from underneath his hail of tracers. But Ben rode it relentlessly, savagely, his yowling guns cutting off every turn, denying every attempt to clutch more altitude. So stubbornly did he keep forcing the German down on the carpet that suddenly, while he was not even firing, the Fokker cartwheeled into a long strip of strewn wreckage. One black-crossed wingtip had grazed an upflung branch.

Wheeling away, Ben saw what looked like a bonfire magnified a thousand times, where someone else of 'B' Flight had matched his opening punch. But the main group of D. H.'s and Spads was heaving into sight now, and the Boches were hurrying to launch themselves into the air.

Darting back toward the German tarmac, Ben's sights ringed the planes that still stood there. A group of three, with silent props; then one by itself, and farther on another. Men like ants ran helter-skelter between the ships. A prop shimmered as a motor started; Ben gave that ship a heavy dose of steel-jacketed lead and saw it spurt black smoke.

Another Fokker got off from behind a hangar before he could intercept it, and still another. He whipped over to see what else was hidden there. Two ships, with spinning props, and two helmeted figures that dashed toward them. Ducking his nose downward, he spewed a fistful of bullets. The figures halted, bumped into each other in confusion, and then ran on. He had to pull up to keep from plunging into the ground, and when he peered down again one of those Fokkers was moving, and a man was climbing into the other.

Ben winged-over to fire again, but just then the corner of the hangar erupted like

a giant geyser just beneath him. The D. H.'s had arrived overhead; that was the first bomb, and its terrific concussion tossed his Spad like a cork. Fiercely he fought to regain balance. He had just seen something that set his heart to racing. One of those last two Fokkers was marked with an eye!

After tumbling dizzily for a moment, he found himself headed away from the field. He whirled back in time to see one Fokker leaving the ground, and the other starting to roll. He gunned toward the first, but as it soared he saw that it was not the one he sought. Immediately he banked away after the other.

Sky and earth now reverberated to the mad din of battle. D. H.'s swooped in twos and threes, and their bombs were making a gory shambles of hangars, barracks, and such planes as still remained on the ground. Spads and Fokkers wheeled and darted overhead, tangled in a struggle too complex to follow. The greasy smoke of flamers, the bright flash of archie, and the silver skeins of tracers filled the shaking air.

But Ben was intent on one foe, and one only. He neared that Fokker as it cleared the ground, but it foiled him by a sharp rising turn. When his lunging speed brought him close enough for a burst, it wiggled aside, managing by frantic maneuvers to keep just beyond reach of his hungry bullets. Then at just the wrong moment a banking D. H. got in the way, and Ben was robbed of his initial advantage of position.

He hurled his Spad over the D. H. like a hurdler clearing a gate, and the Fokker banked to meet him. Very plainly he saw the black and staring eye on its

cowl, and his mouth hardened into a grim slit.

Not until the last split second did either swerve—but it was the Fokker that lurched downward.

With blood trickling down his cheek, and his left arm hanging useless, Ben wheeled to peer downward. And he did not look away until he had seen that Fokker crash heavily in the very center of the drome, and burst immediately into a crater of roaring flame.

"The Spider!" he croaked through lips stiff with emotion.

Far ahead of him, near the lines, he saw a bitter duel in progress. A single Spad was trying to protect one of the big two-seaters from attack, and was engaged in frenzied combat with a foe. Round and round each other the two planes eddied, and the Fokker seemed to be getting the upper hand. Groggily Ben turned toward them, but the end came too soon.



Interlacing tracer streaks knifed the air. Both volleys found a target, and both ships started to fall—but with a difference. The Fokker slewed into a spin that did not stop. The Spad lurched downward in wide, awkward swoops, but was evidently under control, though crippled. Both finished in the same open field. But the German plane crushed itself into a heap of splinters, while the Spad three-pointed to a pancake.

Ben jammed his throttle shut and dove like a streak. That field was actually within the Allied lines, but he was so confused and shaken by his wounds that he did not know it. Taking it for German soil, he thought he saw the need of a hurried rescue.

Before he rolled his wheels to a halt, he saw the group of running figures in khaki and realized his mistake. With tremendous relief, he lifted the goggles from his raw face and peered across the field. His eyes widened in amazement. That other American, climbing stiffly from the dead-stick Spad, was no other than Larry Darstall!

Leaning together, clinging to each other's arms for support, they hobbled toward the shattered Fokker, from which the doughboys were hauling a limp gray-clad figure.

"Drilled through the heart," commented a corporal dryly, kneeling. "Shall I find his dog tag for you, Lieutenant?"

Larry nodded, without interest. But Ben was suddenly staring fixedly. What was so familiar about that Boche? Not his face, with its gaping mouth and glassy eyes—no! The helmet! That was it!

With a choking cry, he dropped to his knees and stripped it off the close-cropped head. "Larry! My helmet! He's wearing it!"

Larry suddenly started. "By God, it is! It's von Speidar!"

"Can you beat that!" Larry cried. "The double-crossing louse! He puts an eye on one plane, but then doesn't use that one himself. No wonder he's kept alive so long!"

Ben opened his mouth to say some-

THE END

thing. But then he closed it in silence. He remembered the two planes next to the German hangar, and the two Boches running toward them. Had his bullets caused them to get mixed up and leap into the wrong ships? Or did the Spider, as Larry guessed, always send one of his men up in the singular Fokker? Had Larry conquered this invincible fighter because the German was in a plane that was strange to him? Or had the young pilot actually bested the Spider with no handicaps to help him? Ben did not know; no one would ever know, now. What difference did it make? Why cast any shadow of doubt on Larry's magnificent and all-important victory?

He looked up, still silent, and noticed that Larry's eyes were glued to the helmet he held in his hand.

"Here" he said suddenly. "It's yours, Larry. Take it."

"Mine! But you may want it yourself, Ben, won't you?"

Ben shook his head. "That helmet belongs to the squadron—to the man who leads, in the air! From now on, that's you, Larry. I'm only the C. O. on the ground. The colonel told me—" He slumped suddenly, so that Larry had to grab him. "But listen, Larry," he added, in a voice growing weaker and weaker. "Keep it where—I can find it. Just in case—in case of emergency—you know?"

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The Baron Drinks to Death

by WILLIAM HARTLEY



Molloy, that madman,
made the Lewis guns talk!

McNamara and Molloy could not be happy till they stuck their heads in the fire, and naturally, two guys like that have to expect to get burned! There is the savage beat of flying fists in this tale of mad adventure; there are thrills enough for a dozen flying fools as the Baron Drinks to Death!

THE three Spads dropped through the clouds in perfect formation and settled slowly to five thousand, then cruised peacefully along the lines. In the lead plane, McNamara futilely whistled a tune against the slipstream, and occasionally turned to look

at Molloy and Breadon in the ships behind him. Once Molloy waved and pointed to a group of planes off to the east, but McNamara shook his head in negation. They were too far away.

Suddenly his face tightened and he looked down over the right side of the

Spad. He had seen something on the ground below, in what was supposed to be deserted territory, but what it had been he did not know. Now he saw it again, a faint whisp of smoke arising from a shell-pocked bit of ground. His suspicions aroused, he turned to his companions and pointed down. The three crates banked sharply and went down in a long glide.

As they approached the ground slowly, McNamara trained his eyes on the scene below. The entire sector had been blasted by months of heavy gunfire, and the few shattered trees that remained were mocking ghosts of the once peaceful countryside. Once again a whisp of smoke curled slowly upward, and for an instant, McNamara saw the muzzle of a gun before it recoiled from his sight.

The set-up was clear to him. Here, miles in advance of the nearest known German artillery, was a battery of big guns, beautifully camouflaged and using smokeless powder. He turned to the other planes and saw the wave of comprehension which the two pilots gave him. Then the three ships headed for home.

The three Spads taxied close to the hangars and the men surrendered them to a group of mechanics, McNamara said, "Come on. We'll all go in to the Old Man and see what he has to say about this."

Molloy grunted, "It's the easiest job we've ever given that bombing crowd down the line. I'm surprised that the camera ships didn't see those babies long ago."

"Yeah," Breadon observed. "Hittin' those guns will be just about as hard as droppin' into bed. Wish the hell I had a job like that."

"You couldn't hit yourself in the foot with a handful of sand," Molloy grinned. "But you're right about it being a soft

snap. I wouldn't mind getting a berth with that outfit myself."

"What are you talking about?" McNamara asked. "You had your chance to go with them, about a month ago. One week of floatin' along in one of those trolley cars and you'd go crazy."

Molloy pushed open the door of field headquarters and they walked in. Major Bowers looked up as they entered. "What's on your mind, boys?"

They saluted and McNamara said, "We just came back from a tour, Major, and we spotted a battery of heavy field pieces that Jerry has dragged up, near Dravegny. They're only about two miles on the other side of the lines, and they'll be able to raise hell with them. They're blasting away right now."

"That's damn close," Bowers frowned. "I'll bet the 32nd will be glad to hear about them."

He picked up the desk phone and in a moment was connected with the nearby bombing squadron.

"This is Bowers at the 24th. A couple of my men have just come back from tour and they tell me that a battery of field pieces is set up, over near Dravegny. They're nicely camouflaged, but they say you'll be able to spot them."

He listened for a moment, then turned to McNamara. "Are you sure you have the place spotted?"

McNamara walked over to the map on the wall and examined it carefully. "Tell them it's 14-32, on the nose," he said.

Bowers relayed the detailed information and waited a long moment for a reply. Then he said, "But these men aren't mistaken. They know their business and wouldn't come in here with a fairy tale."

But the person at the other end of the line failed to agree.

Finally Bowers snapped, "All right, have it your way! But if anything comes

of this, Brown, you're going to be holding the bag. Don't forget that!"

He turned to the puzzled trio.

"They say we're crazy. Brown says that they've photographed that place twenty times, and nothing shows on the plates. He insists that he couldn't be mistaken. Wanted to know if you'd been drinking."

Molloy and Breadon shrugged their shoulders, for the matter was out of their hands. McNamara asked, "Why don't they go out and take another picture? It might be worth their while."

"Brown says that he's lost three ships in the last five days—ever since Remburg moved into the sector. He won't take any pictures, and without photos to show him what he's doing, he says he'll be damned if he's going to go out and blow a lot of holes in the ground for no good reason at all."

"Well, it's none of our business," McNamara shrugged. "But some poor slobs back of the lines are going to be sorry the 32nd didn't listen to us."

Then, with Breadon and Molloy, he left the shack. But the C. O. remained seated at his desk, puffing furiously at his cigarette, his features creased in a heavy frown.

The three walked slowly to the *estaminet*, in complete silence. Over their first drink, it was Molloy who spoke.

"Is that old D. H. still sitting in the hangar?" he asked casually.

"Sure," Breadon said. "I happened to see it this morning. Why, what's on your mind?"

But a light of understanding already shone in McNamara's eyes.

"Boy!" he said. "Wouldn't that be a trick! They'd never be able to forget it! Imagine those tramps, wanting to know if we'd been drinking!" He turned to Molloy. "Do you know that the old bus is fitted with a camera?" He called

for a drink hurriedly. "I can hardly wait to land over there and hand them a few good plates."

Breadon suddenly saw the light. "Hey! That's a hell of a good idea! When do we start?"

"What do you mean, 'we'?" McNamara asked him. "How many do you think that thing carries? Only two of us can go."

Breadon scowled. "And I suppose you two cookies figure that you're going to leave me here to twiddle my thumbs?"

McNamara's smile was almost completely disarming. "Why, Eddie, of course not! We'll flip coins, and the odd man stays. Fair enough?"

"The idea is all right," Breadon agreed. He looked at the other two suspiciously. "But how do I know that you two aren't going to frame me?"

MOLLOY frowned and shook his head. "That's the only thing that I don't like about you, Breadon—you're suspicious. You've a mean nature. You've no faith in the honesty of your fellow men. It reflects on your character, Eddie." He winked at McNamara and that worthy nodded quickly.

Breadon looked at both of them sharply, then said, "Okay, odd man stays home."

They fished coins from their pockets, flipped them in the air, then caught them on the back of their hands. They looked at Breadon's coin and said, "Heads."

An inspection of Molloy's and McNamara's coins revealed the fact that they were both "tails."

"Funny how that happened," McNamara said. Molloy looked at his coin, which was "tails" on both sides, then thought of its twin, which reposed in McNamara's hand. He murmured, half to himself, "It would have been a hell of a lot funnier if it hadn't happened."

Breadon said, "What?" and Molloy muttered, "I just said, 'Yeah, it is funny that it happened.'"

McNamara slapped Breadon on the back. "It's just as well that you lost, Eddie. I have an idea that this is going to be a lousy job—too tough for you, Eddie. Wait until you've been around a while, then we'll take you out on some of the tough assignments."

"Damn nice of you," Breadon snarled. "I can get along without any help from you two bums!"

"Anyway, Eddie," McNamara observed, "you're not missing much. We'll be home in an hour and the whole show will be over."

The three of them walked over to the hangar and ordered out the D. H. One of the mechanics was reluctant to follow their orders.

"Did the Old Man say it was okay?"

Molloy looked at him and shook his head slowly. "Weeks," he said, "it amazes me that a fellow of your habits should ask so many questions. Didn't I see you coming back to the field about three o'clock this morning? Did the Old Man say *that* was okay?"

The man's face colored quickly and he said, "Yes, sir. I'll get it right out." He wheeled back into the hangar and his voice could be heard taking orders to the rest of the crew.

"You never know when it will pay you to pull a bluff. I hit that one right on the nose," Molloy said.

The big Liberty engine was warmed, and McNamara checked the ammo belts for the Vickers and the drums for the rear Lewis guns. He saw that there were a couple of plates for the camera set in the floor boards.

They went to their Nissen and pulled

on flying togs, then went back to the ship. McNamara climbed to the controls while Molloy hoisted himself to the observer's pit. They waved the chocks aside and gestured to Breadon. Next, they were roaring down the field, until McNamara lifted the ship into the air.

Heading for the lines, McNamara adjusted his tube and yelled, "It's a good thing we never let him know about those coins!"

"Yeah," Molloy answered. "The guy probably doesn't know how to work a camera, anyway."

In the forward pit, McNamara's face suddenly clouded.

"Say, do you know anything about it?"

Molloy's voice was hesitant. "W-e-l-l, a little bit. At least, I used to have a camera—a little one."

McNamara swore. "Of all the hare-brained halfwits! You come up here to take pictures and you don't know how to work the camera! What the hell's the matter with you?"

Molloy was on the defensive. "Well, it doesn't look so tough. I've been looking around here, and some of these gadgets seem familiar. I'll get the hang of it." But his modest tone changed swiftly. "Say, do you know how to work this thing?" he asked.

McNamara was surprised: "Well, now—er—you see—"

"I see!" Molloy interrupted him. "Why, you big bag of wind! Bawling me out, when you don't know any more about working a camera than I do about raising oysters! You've got one hell of a nerve!"

"Okay, okay!" McNamara retorted. "Now that we have *that* cleared up, what are we going to do? We might as well go back and call the whole thing off."

"And have that guy Breadon bust his



belly laughing at us? Not on your life!" Molloy was indignant. "We'll fly over those guns and I'll see what I can do with this affair. Who knows—I might get something on these plates after all."

"Yeah," McNamara told him. "You'll get your fingerprints on them, if you touch them with your hands! What a help *you* are!"

"Cut the chatter and get over to Dra-
vengny. We haven't got all day, you know. There's got to be just the right amount of light, if we want a good picture."

They ambled along at ten thousand, and McNamara checked the landscape below against the map he held in his lap.

"Get that contraption ready," he told Molloy. "We've only got about two miles to go."

Molloy was bent over in the pit, fooling with the camera, and his voice was muffled. "Okay, okay." Then, to himself, "I wonder what the hell *this* thing is for?"

McNamara dropped the bus until the altimeter showed four thousand, then he shouted, "We're here, Mike! Let it go! Get that shutter clicking!"

Molloy answered uncertainly, "All right, I'm almost ready. Keep her where she is."

"What do you think this is, a *balloon*?" McNamara asked. He looked over the side at the camouflaged gun pits. "We're

past them, now. Wait until I bring her around."

He banked the D. H. slowly, then came back over the guns. "Take it!" he yelled. And a roaring chorus of Spandau fire was his answer.

He looked back over his shoulder and saw the four Fokkers diving from above. The lead plane was blue, and emblazoned on its side was the figure of a great white boar, tusks bared. Baron Remburg!

He heard Molloy mumbling through the tube, "If I could only find where this wire led to, I'd have the thing licked."

"Never mind the wire!" McNamara yelled. "Don't look now, but we have visitors."

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Molloy jerk upright in the pit, then heard his lusty curse as he whipped the tube and earphones from his head and swung the Lewis guns towards the Fokkers. McNamara heard their noisy chatter, in a moment, and stole another glance behind him.

THE lead plane had sheared off from its direct descent and was whipping over to the side. McNamara watched the stream of tracer following it, and the Fokker zoomed as the lead bit into the empennage. The second plane came down after the first, but again the German pilot pulled his ship out of the steady stream

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of fire and arced off to the right. This time, Molloy was following him more closely, and McNamara heard the shout of triumph from the rear pit as a train of black, oily smoke billowed from the Fokker's motor. The pilot must have been hit, too, for the ship went off on one wing and spun crazily off to the right.

McNamara abandoned his policy of flight and whipped the shivering D. H. around in a tight bank and pulled up the nose. His maneuver caught the next Boche dead to rights, and the flaming Vickers traced a smoke line across the sky that ended in the bed of a screaming Mercedes. The Fokker came out of its dive before its object was reached, and as its narrow belly rocketed overhead, both the Vickers and the Lewis chewed the floorboards to splinters. The crate flew apart in mid-air.

The fight had carried them about two miles behind the lines, and as the two remaining Fokkers came on, one from either side, McNamara felt the crate go dead as a burst ripped into the Liberty. He shouted, "That's all, Mike," and looked for a likely place to set it down.

But the two Fokkers weren't willing to call it a day, and McNamara saw that the only thing that was saving him from lead poisoning was that madman Molloy, in the rear pit. The Lewises chattered on the mounting, and several times it was merely a matter of inches that prevented them from bringing down another Fokker, disabled as they were. Twice, he saw the line of tracer from Molloy's guns stitch a seam along the fuselage of one of the German ships, right up to the pit. However, the Boche crate managed to weather the storm of steel.

McNamara was heading down, now, at a steep angle, and about a mile away he could see the smooth surface of a flying field. The field was fringed by a line of tall trees, and towards these the D. H.

was heading. The fire from the Fokkers continued, and McNamara grumbled, "What the hell's the story? Why don't you get some clay pigeons, if you want target practice?"

But then he realized that the Lewises were still going full blast. He turned and snarled, "That damned Molloy! He never has enough! Back there with his lousy guns, making those guys sore, while I sit here and get potted! Serve him right if he got drilled!"

There was only about three hundred feet of air under the crate, now, and it was dropping fast. McNamara was jockeying the controls, trying to lift the D. H. over the line of trees, and he was too occupied to bother with the Fokker that came slanting in from the side. The instrument board was churned to splinters before his amazed and resentful eyes, then something hot and heavy smote him on the head. McNamara went out like a light.

However, he was out for only a moment. When he opened his eyes, the D. H. was perched precariously in the top of the tallest tree, and Molloy was shouting, "Who the hell do you think you are, Tarzan of the Apes? This is a fine place to land! What's the matter with that field over there?"

There was a red haze before McNamara's eyes, and he lifted his hand to brush it away. A slug had creased his forehead, but a hasty inspection proved that the wound was merely a deep scratch. He stopped the flow of blood with a handkerchief, then turned to the indignant Molloy.

"What are you shouting about? You're lucky I got you down alive! What a bundle of brains you are, Molloy! There we are with a dead motor and two Fokkers on our tail, and instead of leaving well enough alone and calling it quits, you have to rile those birds and keep ham-

mering away at them. They probably would have let us land, decently, if you hadn't been so lippy."

"Hell," Molloy told him. "I was too interested in shooting at them to notice what you were doing. How could I know that the bus had conked?"

"You might have tried to figure out what was wrong, when we started to fall," McNamara snarled. "You've got a head like a pin!"

He looked toward the field and saw the squad of soldiers running in their direction. The two Fokkers had landed and were being wheeled to a hangar.

As the group of grey-clad men approached, McNamara said to Molloy, "Remember, now, none of your heroics. We haven't got a chance in a thousand of getting out of this, *now*. Maybe later, when we're able to look the situation over, but not now. You just throw away that gun and climb down like a little gentleman. I don't feel like any pigeon, and I don't want these tin hats standing down there taking potshots at us."

"You don't have to give me any instructions," Molloy said. "I can take care of myself."

"Yeah you always manage to take care of yourself, but you don't care what the hell happens to me."

The soldiers arrived under the tree, and one of them started shouting to the two men high in the branches. The two Yanks couldn't understand a word he said, but the pointed Mausers told them enough. McNamara and Molloy threw down their automatics and descended slowly. Once on the ground, they were placed in the center of the squad and marched off toward the group of hangars.

The leader called a halt before a small building which was evidently *staffel* headquarters, and rapped on the door. A bel-

lowing voice answered, and the sergeant bade the two Americans to step inside.

McNamara was first, and Molloy, at his shoulder, whistled as they saw the huge figure seated behind the desk at the other end of the room.

"They must have had *two* Mercedes in that Fokker to get that horse off the ground!"

"Yeah," McNamara agreed. "He is big, isn't he? It's the Baron himself. I've seen his picture somewhere."

THE massive man behind the desk spoke in but slightly accented English. "So I am a horse, eh? That is the first time anyone has dared to address the Baron Remburg in such a manner. Who are you, you impudent dogs?"

McNamara gestured over his shoulder at Molloy. "He's Buffalo Bill, and I'm the Prince of Pittsburgh. Glad to meet you."

The German growled deep in his throat. "Insolent *schwein*! I will teach you to play with me!"

He arose from behind the desk and came toward them. He was big—he topped McNamara's six foot two by four inches, and he had a chest like a barrel. His small, bullet head was shaven, except for a tuft of hair at the front, while a monocle covered one of his small, pig-like eyes. He advanced upon McNamara and swung his right in a backhanded slap.

McNamara said, "What a sucker!" and set himself. His right hand traveled in a beautiful straight line and landed with a *clop* on the German's chin. The giant staggered backwards, fell over the desk, and rolled unconscious on the floor.

Molloy said, "Now you've done it!" and turned to face the squad of soldiers who suddenly rushed them.

The battle was short and sweet, but



soon McNamara and Molloy were securely bound and slammed against the wall. Several officers bent over the limp form of Remburg, and in a few minutes helped him to his feet. He glared at the two, then directed his gaze at McNamara.

"A fighter, eh?"

McNamara grinned. "I can take care of myself."

Remburg snarled and moved toward him, then stopped suddenly.

"Tonight, my fine friend, we shall see how well you fight, when life itself is the stake." He drew a great breath into his enormous chest and flexed his thick arms. "You have seen the picture of the fighting boar, on my plane?"

"You mean that pig with its mouth open?" McNamara asked.

Remburg's face grew purple. "Pig! That is no pig!" Then he became suddenly calm. "Take them away, sergeant, and guard them well. They will provide us with the evening's sport."

Prodded with rifles, the two were marched to a small concrete building down the field. They were thrown within, and they heard the key turn in the lock of the barred door.

Molloy waved his hand, from which the bonds had been removed. "Well, you certainly fixed things up, didn't you. What was it you'd been telling me? Something about—'Don't be lippy!'—'Be a little gentleman!' The first time someone raises his hand to you, *bango!* What the hell are we going to do now?"

"I don't know," McNamara confessed. "But we're no worse off than we were before. What does this joint look like?" He started on an inspection tour around their cramped quarters. The cell was about ten by ten, and except for the door and a small barred window at the rear, solid concrete from floor to ceiling.

"We have about as much chance of

breaking out of here as your little niece would have of breaking out of Sing Sing," Molloy told him.

"What the hell would my little niece be doing in Sing Sing?" McNamara wanted to know. "Besides, I haven't got a niece."

"All right, forget about it. But what was his nibs talking about—'They will provide sport for the evening?' What do you think he has up his sleeve?"

"One of the biggest arms you ever did see. I heard someone talking about the guy, once. He's a strong man, or something. Challenges all the professional wrestlers, and gives them five thousand dollars if they beat him. But he's never been beaten. I don't know what he has in his bonnet. But it won't be long before we find out."

Dusk was already falling, and the small jail was shadowed by the tall trees. Molloy pulled out a pack of cigarettes and they sat smoking as they waited developments.

It was nine o'clock by Molloy's watch when four soldiers approached the hut, and one of them unlocked the door. They were motioned outside and marched in the direction of a long, low building which McNamara supposed was the mess hall.

"What's up?" he asked the leader of the group.

The man said nothing, but grinned evilly.

"Well, you can bet your hat that it's not going to be any tea and cookies party," Molloy said. "I must say that I'm not crazy about the whole set-up."

"What the hell," McNamara said. "We've gotten out of worse jams than this."

The door of the mess hall opened to admit them, and the place was ablaze with light. The center of the room was bare, but the floor was surrounded by

a huge table at which sat the officers of the squadron. Remburg sat at the head of the board, and his roaring voice greeted them.

"Well, here you are at last. What has been keeping you?" He roared with laughter at the simple jest.

"A wise guy," McNamara said. "The comedians are on now, Mike. I guess we missed the seals."

"Silence!" Remburg roared. He shouted at a flunkey. "Give them their glasses, and all stand for the toast."

An underling handed McNamara and Molloy glasses filled to the brim with wine, and they watched while the assemblage rose as one man. Remburg's voice again dominated the gathering.

"Dogs," he addressed them, "you are fortunate to be with us on an evening of this sort. It is not often that we can take the time to have our guests at these pleasantries. If you wonder at my words, let me make myself more clear.

"We drink a toast, now—a toast to Death, that glorious companion of every true warrior." He pointed to the two Americans. "He is to be *your* companion this evening, upon certain conditions." He laughed boisterously. "Lucky fellows!"

His laughter vanished as quickly and as suddenly as if he had removed a mask from his face, and he glared at McNamara.

"A few hours ago, dog, you were quite willing to fight. Does the desire still remain with you?"

McNamara's gaze was steady and level. "Yeah, I don't mind, hoghead."

Remburg's face was cold and cruel. "Very well. You and I are to fight—to the finish. If you win—" his laughter had the cutting edge of a knife—"both you and your companion shall go free. If you lose, however, you are to die in the morning. Is it agreed?"

"The terms aren't quite what they might be, but what the hell can I do about it? Sure, it's a go."

Remburg raised his glass. "To Death!"

"Yeah," Molloy snarled, "to ours!" He turned to McNamara. "Listen, lame-brain, let me take this guy on. I'll throw him through a wall. He's too big for you!"

"Too big for *me!*" Molloy shouted. "Where the hell do you get that stuff? If he's too big for me, what would *you* do with him?" He smiled patronizingly. "Listen, Mike, you better stick to shadow-boxing. You couldn't punch a time-clock, you boob!"

Molloy grabbed him by the shoulder, "Why you—"

They were interrupted by a shout from Remburg, "Ready?"

THEY turned to see the baron approaching from the other end of the floor. His torso was naked, and the light shone on the great cask of a chest and the powerful bunches of muscle in the arms and shoulders. McNamara could see that he was going to have his hands full. He turned to Molloy and handed him his glass.

"Be a good little boy and hold this for me. I'll be right back." He ripped off his shirt and strode to meet the German. A murmur of amazement went up from the crowd of officers as McNamara's beautiful build was bared to the light. The great, heavily muscled shoulders and bull neck were equal to those of Remburg, but looser and cleaner. The long arms were cords of flowing steel, and the great hands were clenched masses of meat and bone.

The two met in the center of the room, and Remburg reached out an experimental paw. McNamara stepped close, unexpectedly, and his left hooked into Remburg's face with a sickening sound. The German bellowed with rage and stag-

gered back, his face a crimson smear. McNamara followed slowly, and his right hand chugged to the stomach.

He stepped back and waited for Remburg to come to him. He knew the man was enormously strong, and that the fight was to be long and hard fought. He conserved his strength.

Remburg came—with a speed unbelievable in such a big man, and McNamara found himself locked in those huge arms. The German butted down with his head, and the American turned his face aside barely in time. He felt Remburg start to bring his knee up, and twisted enough to avoid it. He grinned. So this was the way the boy wanted to play!

He reached up with his left hand and grasped Remburg's neck. He pulled down with the hand, and at the same time brought up his right. The blow landed squarely on Remburg's mouth, and the sound of the breaking teeth was audible through the room. The German thrust him aside and spat a mouthful of blood on the floor, then came in again.

McNamara was waiting for him and sent both hands thudding to the body. Remburg's hands lowered and McNamara dropped him on his back with a straight right.

The German was slow to arise, but when he did he charged with all the fury of a wounded bear. He hit McNamara low, around the knees, and both men went to the floor. Remburg secured a hammerlock that threatened to break McNamara's arm, but the American twisted out of it after three minutes of agony. They came to their feet and circled each other slowly.

McNamara rushed, and Remburg smashed him high on the forehead with paralyzing force. He staggered back, almost blinded by the blow, and Remburg reached him, turned him around, and locked him in a beautiful full-nelson. The

terrific pressure on his neck revived McNamara quickly, and he threw his arms above his head and dropped out of the hold. He scrambled to his feet to face the furious German.

Both men were bleeding, now, and both chests were heaving with the exertion. McNamara took stock of the situation and believed himself to be in the better shape. The German's great chest was working like a bellows and the fear of defeat was far back in his eyes.

McNamara caught a glimpse of Molloy at a table.

"How are we doing, Mike?" he panted.

"Lousy," Molloy told him. "I could have taken that tramp five minutes ago."

McNamara went to the German, now, and hit him a series of smashing blows that sounded like a spade slapping damp turf. Remburg was off balance and going backward, and McNamara dropped him with a left hook that traveled about eight inches.

The German fell near the fireplace at the end of the room, and he was slow in rising. He came to his full height and reached behind him. McNamara divined his intentions as Remburg grasped the heavy candlestick with his right hand. He went in swiftly, but not swiftly enough.

The heavy metal grazed his head and went thudding into his shoulder, cutting a deep gash. McNamara snarled furiously, whirled, and grasped the arm. Bending at the waist and heaving with both arms, he threw Remburg halfway down the room with a beautifully executed flying mare.

McNamara let him get to his feet, then he whistled a left hook to his head, and even as the Boche was falling, he chopped a right to the point of the giant's chin. Remburg crashed into a table and fell to the floor, completely unconscious.

One pair of hands applauded wildly and one voice shouted an acclaim.

"Ataboy, Mac! Ataboy! I couldn't have done it nicer myself!"

McNamara turned and grinned at Malloy. "The guy was tough, but he wasn't nice. I'd rather fight you anytime, Mike."

They were herded into a corner while frantic efforts were made to revive Remburg. Molloy handed McNamara his shirt and said, "Here, put this thing on, I'm sick of holding it. You sure made a mess of that tramp."

"Yeah," McNamara replied. "It wasn't a bad job. But imagine what would have happened to you."

"Never mind that stuff. What are these guys going to do with us?"

"You heard what his nibs said, didn't you? He's going to let us go back home. Do you think he's on the level?"

"The guy's as crooked as a corkscrew," Molloy snarled. "The way he fights is a pretty good indication of the way he thinks and talks. We'll never get out of here alive, if we depend on him."

He was right, for in a few minutes, when Remburg had been brought around, he walked over to the two prisoners, mopping his blood-smeared face with a towel.

"No man has beaten Baron Remburg and lived to tell of it," he scowled. "And you are no exception. You die in the dawn." He walked away, and the shame

of his defeat was evident. The Germans in the room stared disbelievingly at their chief who had broken a sporting pledge.

THE two Americans were walked back to their cell, and the door clanged shut on them. Molloy sat on the rude bunk, while McNamara drank heartily from a can of water on the table.

Their attention was arrested by a low whisper at the window of their cell. They whirled together, and breathed a single word together, "Breadon!" McNamara rubbed his eyes, disbelievingly. "How the hell did you get here?" he asked.

Breadon's grinning face peered in at them. "Just thought I'd take a run over and see how you two bums were getting along. Not doing so well, are you, wise guys?" There was a taunt in his question and a wide grin across his pleasant face. Outside the night was still, the lone sentry walking in the distance.

McNamara shrugged his shoulders carelessly, "We'll do all right," he tried to bluff, "I got it all figured out, mug. We'll spring ourselves before morning."

"You'll be out of hell by the morning," Breadon told him. "Don't try to talk big with me! You're in a jam and little Eddie is the only guy who can get you out,

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and don't forget it. Wise guys, eh? What a laugh! Do you want me to get you out of here, or are you too proud?"

"Well," Molloy said, "we might as well go with you. It'll save us a lot of trouble. How the hell did you get over here?"

"I took the subway," Breadon snarled, "how the hell do you think I got here? I thought you guys might be in a jam, and when you didn't come back, why, I came over to see what had happened to you. I spotted the bus in that big tree and figured that Remburg had you over here. Just before it got dark, I landed down the line a way and came up here to see what was to be done. By the way, Tommy," he addressed McNamara, "that was a pretty nice brawl. I watched the whole thing through a window. You didn't do so badly, but I could have put the guy away much faster."

McNamara snorted. "You and Molloy ought to fight it out for the world's championship. You're both too good to be true. Cut the gab and tell us how we're going to crash this joint. Where did you leave your ship?"

"I burned it," Breadon said calmly.

"Burned it!" McNamara and Molloy chorused. "What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Well, it wouldn't have taken the lot of us back, so what good was it? Besides, this joint is lousy with planes. We can take our pick."

"Sure," McNamara said scornfully. "Have them wheel out a couple of Rumplers, will you, and warm them on the line."

"Okay," Breadon told him. "I'll be right back." Then he was gone from the deep shadow of the window.

"The guy is insane," Molloy whispered. "He comes over here, burns his ship, then says he'll get us a couple of Rumplers. He must have hit his skull when he landed."

"He'll be back," McNamara said, "a sadder and wiser youth. Let's wait for him."

Molloy looked at him. "Sure you wouldn't like to go for a little walk?"

In fifteen minutes Breadon was back at the window. He had just announced his arrival, when the solitary guard made his round. Breadon slipped cautiously away.

He ghosted off to the side of the building, and soon the two inmates of the cell heard a muffled grunt and a dull thud, as of a body falling. Breadon came back whistling, this time to the door itself.

"What are you trying to do," Molloy whispered fiercely, "wake up this joint? Take it easy!"

Breadon inserted the key in the lock and opened the door. "Welcome to our fair city, gentlemen." Then, "I'll bet this isn't the first time you two birds got out of jail. Come on. I've got a surprise for you."

He led the wondering pair down to the end of the field, and there two dark shapes took definite form.

"Rumplers!" McNamara exclaimed. "And two of them!"

"Yeah," Breadon told him. "And if you think it was any picnic wheeling these things down from the hangar, all by myself, you're crazy. I had to conk another guard to get them."

"Let's not hang around here any longer," Molloy said. "Let's get them warmed and get the hell out of here."

"There's going to be a little hell raised around here before we get off the ground," Breadon said. "But it's a lot better than sitting on your can waiting until Remburg makes up his mind what to do with you."

The two ships were at one end of the field, heading away from the tarmac, and Molloy parked himself at the Parabellums in the rear of one crate, while McNamara

and Breadon got the other turning over. The sudden roar of the motor had the expected effect, and pilots and mechanics swarmed from the buildings and rushed towards the planes.

The Parabellums began to chatter their wicked song, and the rush stopped. The second prop was whirled, then Breadon took the other set of guns. Since the Boche could only approach from one side, the three Yanks commanded the situation. Then McNamara said, "Let's turn these crates around and get the hell out of here. This is too good to last much longer."

After the ships were wheeled about, with Breadon alone in his, and McNamara at the controls of the other, they swept down the field, blasting before them the few sleepy-eyed and flabbergasted Huns who remained to block their progress.

They soared over the lines, and just as the dawn patrol was taking off from the field of the 24th, they set the German ships down at the far end of the field and hopped out.

Major Bowers was the first to greet them, and his countenance was both

amazed and joyful. He asked for the story and it was told to him in detail.

"Well," McNamara said, "things aren't so bad. No one got hurt—we all had a lot of fun, and we can go over today and take care of those big guns. The only thing that bothers me is that we didn't get another crack at that Remburg. We should have dusted him off before we left."

Breadon snapped his fingers. "That reminds me," then walked back to the Rumpler in which he had flown. He mounted the step and reached into the rear pit. He heaved and tugged for a moment, then the bound and gagged form of Baron Remburg was hoisted to the edge of the pit.

"Here he is, boys. The wild boar of Germany—prize exhibit at the fair. He came messing around when I was getting the Rumplers and I had to conk him, too. I thought it might be a good idea to bring him along as a surprise for these clumsy pals of mine."

McNamara swore vehemently, "Why, I'll be a stinkin' kiwi! And we told this guy we had a job for *men!*"

THE END

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UPDRAFT LATEST DISCOVERY
IN PIPES

Aces Fly Alone

by Darrell Jordan

More things than glory came to Bill Hammond when he downed that German Ace, for he learned he had entered the Doors of Sudden Death, when he fell for the plot of a master spy!

Two men fought fiercely
for the lives of others.

BILL HAMMOND'S eyes were squinted against the slanting glare of the dying sun, and the fading light bathed the swift wings of his Spad with a crimson tinge. The black grime of powder and sweat formed a dark mask over his hard-jawed face. Through the ring sights a sombre shape flickered momentarily, and Hammond's thumbs came down on the triggers, sending a sharp stabbing burst into the white fuselage of the Pfalz.

The American's left foot twitched the rudder bar, and the smoky line of tracers swerved to follow up to the pilot's pit where the Boche flyer crouched. But the German reeled aside in time and came slashing around in a vertical bank, sending the Pfalz rushing up at Hammond. The Yank sideslipped away from the



spitting muzzles of the Spandaus and wheeled for a fresh attack.

In the split-second that the two ships were roaring along side by side, Hammond flung a searching glance at the Hun and received a twisted smile and derisive wave of the hand in return. This lonely battle in the fading light would, Hammond thought, settle once and for all his feud of long standing with Hauptmann Paul Vanderberg.

Vanderberg, an outstanding flyer in the ranks of the Imperial German Air Service, seemed destined to fame as one of the Fatherland's greatest aces. Since the day, two weeks before, when a close friend of his had fallen in flames before the Vickers of Bill Hammond, he had made no secret of his intention to square the score. Twice they had met, and in each instance a combination of circumstances had prevented the finale of the battle. This time, Hammond swore, that would not happen.

For the first time he had caught Vandenberg on the Allied side of the lines. Hammond's hand strayed to the pocket of his Sidcott suit, and his fingers closed over the tiny squat figure of a Chinese joss he always carried for luck. For Hammond was superstitious, and didn't care who knew it.

Then the Pfalz half-rolled, and went diving away with Hammond in swift pursuit. They circled, darting in at each other like boxers waiting for an opening. The break came to Hammond first, and he seized it eagerly. Vandenberg had skidded on a turn, and for a moment the Pfalz lost flying speed. Hammond went screaming down, the scarlet scarf he wore whipping behind the headrest. The song of the Vickers rose to a maniacal chant, cutting momentarily closer to the staggering Pfalz. Then abruptly Hammond backsticked in surprise.

Black smoke was spewing from the Mercedes' exhaust stacks in great dark gouts. The Pfalz nearly stalled. Then Vanderberg fought it out of a threatened spin and it went into a shallow glide. The flailing prop had slowed until only the rush of the wind spun it slowly. Vanderberg's motor was dead; he was heading toward a forced landing—and in American territory!

Twice the German tried to swerve toward the lines, to stretch his glide into No-Man's-Land, but each time the khaki Spad was there, menacing him with waiting Vickers. Hammond pointed significantly toward the Yankee back areas. The Hauptmann shrugged, edged reluctantly toward the spot Hammond indicated.

Hammond saw instantly that the gliding Pfalz could never make the distance to the 25th's drome, and he quickly selected a small field some five miles from the squadron base.

Vanderberg saw the field, nodded his head. Once Hammond was sure the Pfalz must land there, he cut swiftly in ahead, came in fast and fishtailed to a bumpy landing. When the white Pfalz dropped over the border of trees that lined the field, Hammond was waiting, Colt drawn.

He was running beside the Pfalz before it slowed to a stop, alert to prevent the attempt Vanderberg was sure to make to burn his disabled ship. But apparently the menace of the automatic in the American's steady hand was enough, for under its muzzle the darkfaced Hun slowly clambered to the ground, hands raised.

"It's hardly necessary to remind you that you're my prisoner," Hammond stated coldly. "I'd advise you not to make any breaks."

Vanderberg smiled bitterly. "It is you



who again have the 'breaks,' *mein freund*," he said harshly. "But luck will not always help you. I am not yet dead, and until I am, your life is forfeit!"

"Have it your own way," Hammond retorted. He paused for a moment, undecided. The Pfalz really should have a guard, but it was disabled, and there was small chance of anything happening to it during the night. Besides, the nearest ground troops were miles away, and Hammond was in a hurry. Tomorrow, after he had finished the dawn mission to which he had been assigned, he could return here and fly the captured ship home. Arriving at that decision, he motioned Vanderberg brusquely toward the idling Spad.

"Get on that wing," he ordered sharply. "I'm taking you for a little ride!"

The German sullenly took up a position on the Spad's lower wing, grasping strut and wires for handholds. Watching him narrowly, Hammond clambered back into the cockpit and gunned the Spad into the air.

Fifteen minutes later he landed on the drome of the 25th in the last of the fading daylight. Men on the ground had caught sight of Hammond's unwilling passenger, and Major McDonnell and a half dozen pilots were waiting as the Spad slowed and stopped. All of them recognized Vanderberg. Hammond found himself in the center of a group of congratulating Yanks.

The German stepped before the S. C. and saluted stiffly. His face was flaming with ugly emotion.

"I am your prisoner, Herr Major. My greatest regret is that I was not captured by a more worthy opponent!"

Major McDonnell concealed a smile. "You need not feel humiliated on that score, Herr Hauptmann. Lieutenant Hammond is one of our best pilots."

Vanderberg shot Hammond a dark glance. "This was not my lucky day," he

continued. "Last night a dog howled on our tarmac, and I should have heeded the warning. I suppose I go immediately to a prison camp?"

"So you're superstitious, too?" the Major grinned, winking at Hammond. "Well, you're not the only one. Yes, a prison camp, Hauptmann Vanderberg, but not until tomorrow at least. We'll try to use you right, in the meantime."

Hammond freed himself from the group demanding details of the fight and turned toward his Nissen. McDonnell called to him.

"Come into my office when you've finished your report."

Hammond nodded, entered his hutment and removed the Chinese amulet from his pocket. He grinned at it, took off his flying clothes and scrawled a brief combat report. As he came out of the Nissen he noticed a tall, beady-eyed French civilian talking with the C Flight leader. At headquarters shack, McDonnell carefully shut the door behind him and motioned Hammond to a chair.

"This job I told you about, for tomorrow morning," the C. O. began. "I'll give you the details now. A bunch of brass hats, including several War Department officials, are coming up to the Front in the morning by train. You'll take off at four, meet the train outside Barsette, and fly convoy until it reaches the railhead at Chalmers. Just a precaution, you understand, in case a wandering Boche bomber might try something. But the job's important. The secret of the train's passengers may possibly have leaked out, but we don't think so. H. Q. doesn't want to use more than one plane for fear of attracting too much attention. That's all, Bill."

Hammond nodded. "Who's this Frog wandering around on the field?"

McDonnell chuckled. "A chap who makes a living out of suckers like you.

He's a mind-reader, crystal gazer, or whatever you want to call it. The boys say he's good, too. Just a harmless old Frog who showed up this afternoon with a pass. But I'm shoving him along in the morning, so if you crave to know what lies in your future you'd better find out tonight."

"Thanks, Major," Hammond's eyes were glittering eagerly. "I'll do that right now!"

WHEN he came into the recreation building, Hammond saw that the traditional binge in honor of the captured German ace was already under way. Vanderberg was drinking, growing steadily more sullen. In one corner behind a small table sat the bearded Frenchman. Hammond noticed that the room was unusually quiet, and the pilot who was in the act of coming away from the table was white faced.

"He told me plenty," the Yank muttered. "This guy is good!"

"How about giving me a chance?" Hammond demanded, approaching the table. Then Vanderberg spoke up harshly.

"Why not both of us together, Lieutenant, since our lives seem to meet so often?"

Hammond shrugged, and American and German sat down before the seer. Hammond, always a firm believer in such things, had to admit that this Deveaux was impressive. Something about the man's gleaming black eyes and impassive face stirred him strangely, sent a cold chill racing up his spine.

He saw that Deveaux used no crystal ball, nor any of the other common paraphernalia of his clan. Instead, he stared steadily, first at Hammond, then at Vanderberg. His gaze shifted to a point over their heads and the pupils of his eyes contracted to slits. Hammond could compare them to nothing but the orbs of a huge

cat. Then Deveaux began to speak slowly, with portentous calm.

"I see a man in a Pfalz—a great man of war—as you call him, a great ace. But he is destined to go on to even greater glory, to reach great heights of fame among his countrymen. I also see a man who has but a few short hours to live! He, too, thinks to win glory, but death will come to him instead. That is all, gentlemen!"

Hammond leaped to his feet, upsetting the table. "It's all a damned lie!" he cried savagely.

Deveaux recoiled from his flaming gaze. "I only tell what I see," he said humbly.

Hammond was conscious of the quiet faces of his squadron mates as he turned blindly toward the door. The jeering laughter of Hauptmann Vanderberg floated after him as he strode out on the dark tarmac. Then McDonnell came running after him and caught his arm.

"Listen, Hammond, don't be a damned fool! The old geezer simply took a dislike to you, or else wanted to start something. Hell, it's childish to believe anything like that!"

"Is it?" Hammond grated. "Major, I've seen some funny things happen in this war, and so have you! Remember the night Pete Daley turned up the ace of spades when he was cutting the cards? He tried to laugh it off, but five minutes later he went out and blundered into a revving prop! Remember when Herb Baring got so tight he took the third light on a cigarette? Baring had been through a dozen campaigns with the Foreign Legion, through fifty airfights. But an Archie shell brought him down that same day; the first hit they'd got in this sector in two years! Sure I believe in these things; I can't help it!"

"In that case, I'll send someone else in the morning," McDonnell suggested quietly.

Hammond shrugged. "No. I'll go. Anyway, it wouldn't do any good to stay on the ground. When your time's up, you're going, that's all."

The Squadron Commander swore hoarsely as Hammond moved off through the gloom.

For an hour Hammond walked the field, telling himself that the whole affair was childish. There was nothing mysterious about it; Deveaux must have known the first part of his prophesy to be true. The rest—the doom he had pronounced upon Hammond—was simply an effort to spread gloom. By this time Vanderberg would be locked up, to await his transportation to a prison camp, and then he would finish his war career. The feud was over and Hammond had won. But, in spite of his line of reasoning, Hammond was aware of a strange sense of catastrophe, and couldn't chase the cloud from his mind.

The field was quiet, save for the faint sounds of sentries' steps, long before Hammond dropped off to sleep. That sleep was broken with horrible nightmares in which he found himself whirling down toward the earth in a flaming Spad. The dreams became more and more realistic. Hammond awoke from a miasmic nightmare in which Satan was prodding him toward a bottomless pit with a sharp spear. Abruptly Hammond jerked into full consciousness. There was a reason for his dream!

Over him stood a dark figure which held a menacing Colt jammed against his temple. A voice surcharged with desperate purpose murmured in Hammond's ear.

"Get up, lieutenant, and light that candle on the box," came the order. "If you make a false move, or cry out, this gun will blow your brains out!"



Silently, his heart racing madly, Hammond obeyed. As the faint light sprang up he saw that the man bending over him was Hauptmann Vanderberg!

The German's eyes were two gleaming orbs. "Get into flying clothes," he commanded. "If anyone blunders into the tent, I'll kill you, even if I die the next moment!"

Hammond knew that Vanderberg was desperate, that he would shoot to kill at the slightest excuse. Silently he struggled into the Sidcott suit, and stepped out on the tarmac into the gloom which preceded the dawn. He shivered as the cold air bit

through the heavy suit to his pajamas. A glance at his wrist watch told him that the hour was near four, with dawn perhaps another hour and a half distant. A dim winged shape loomed through the swirling fog,

and Hammond knew that his Spad was on the line, probably with a mechanic readying it for the special flight. In the gloom cast by the bulk of the nearest hangar, Vanderberg halted him.

"Listen carefully, Yankee, if you wish to live. If the mechanic has your ship ready, step out and tell him to return to his bunk. Remember that this gun will be lined on your back every moment, and I've never been known to miss at that range!"

Racking his brain for some means of escape, Hammond had no choice but to obey. He stepped boldly up to the plane, and the grease monkey turned expectantly.

"She's all set to go, lieutenant," he reported, jumping down from the wing. The Hisso was clicking over quietly.

"All right, corporal, get back to bed," Hammond said quietly.

He was on the point of making a desperate leap toward the cockpit when Vanderberg's dark figure slid up beside him.

"Get on the wing. I am flying this ship! It is my turn to give you a ride!"

Under the menace of the jabbing gun barrel, Hammond crawled upon the wing, his body flat, hands and feet grasping for holds. Simultaneously, Vanderberg vaulted into the pit, and Hammond's hoarse yell was drowned by the sudden thunder of the unleashed Hispano. The Spad scuttled down the field, rose with a rush of cocarded wings into the morning darkness.

ON HIS precarious perch, Hammond clung for his life, trying to think. How had Vanderberg escaped? What was his purpose in taking the unnecessary risk of bringing Hammond along?

Before he could decide on an answer, the Spad keeled into a gentle glide and the dark earth came rushing up at them. The fog was rising swiftly, and in the first gray light of dawn Vanderberg set the Spad down with consummate skill upon a rough and bumpy field. Hammond stared in astonishment as he recognized the spot. This was the same small field where he had forced the German to land the night before. The proof lay in the shape of the Pfalz still standing where it had been left. That was it; Vanderberg had come back here for his own plane!

Before Hammond could slide his cramped body to the ground, Vanderberg was beside him, hauling him down. As the Yank stumbled he saw an expression of triumph spring into the Hun's gloating eyes.

"*Auf wiedersehen, mein freund!*" said the Hauptmann. With the words, he struck a short, chopping blow with the barrel of the automatic. Hammond felt the pain of the stunning blow, then he sank into a void of star-shot blackness.

When the blackness lifted, Hammond realized that he could not have been un-

conscious for more than a short time, for the light was just beginning to make objects distinguishable. Abruptly he leaped to his feet, ignoring the throbbing of his head. Vanderberg had not taken the Pfalz, but the Spad! In a flash of comprehension Hammond understood the ingenious plot.

Vanderberg's motor had not been disabled yesterday; he had faked that in order to be taken prisoner! The German had known that he would not be taken to a prison camp until the following morning. And before that time someone, undoubtedly the psuedo-Frenchman, Deveaux, was to free him—and had done so!

Everything fitted now. The Huns had learned of the train's precious cargo, and the entire scheme had been devised to enable Vanderberg to secure the Spad with its distinguishing numerals. The right Spad *had* to be used, and the *hauptmann* had it!

If the Pfalz *was* in flying condition—Hammond lunged toward it with desperate haste. In a moment he had the wheels chocked with stone, and the throttle and switch set. With his wrench on the heavy prop the motor roared into eager response! Instantly Hammond was in the pit, rocking the wheels over the chocks and ruddering about for the takeoff.

In a saner moment, the task of lifting a strange type ship from that small, bumpy meadow would have seemed impossible to him. But the cold rush of fury through his brain precluded clear thinking, and before he realized that the ordeal was over, the Pfalz was soaring into the gray sky. Hammond headed directly toward Barsette, his left hand pounding the throttle for more speed.

As he flew, the icy slipstream seemed to clear his brain to hard calmness. He had to give Vanderberg credit for lacking the coldbloodedness to murder him. He knew that Vanderberg had brought him

along in order to cover his own escape. As far as anyone at the drome knew, Hammond had taken off on his mission according to schedule. The escape of the *hauptmann* might not be discovered for an hour or more; at any rate, too late.

And the German had undoubtedly reasoned that, upon regaining consciousness, Hammond would conclude that he had made his escape to the Hun lines in the Spad and would not follow. The question occurred to the tense Yank: what could Vanderberg do? What damage could he inflict on the train? The Spad had not carried bombs. In spite of that thought, the feeling grew upon Hammond that the German had some effective plan in mind.

Mentally he reviewed the terrain between Barsette and Chalmers, the distance the train must have already covered. His watch indicated four-thirty, which meant that the train should be in the vicinity of the tunnel and bridge twenty miles east of Barsette. At thought of that spot he tensed in his seat. That would be the place where Vanderberg would spring his trap!

Miles flitted beneath the hurtling white wings of the Pfalz and steadily the visibility increased. Ahead of Hammond appeared a thin black streak that marked the railbed. Then smoke billowed into the sky; came crawling upward in a long, sinuous stream. There was the train! And circling over it glinted the khaki wings of a cocarded Spad!

Hammond cursed hoarsely. Up there Vanderberg would be sitting, cruel mouth twisted, while below, staff officers and government officials rode secure in the belief that an American pilot guarded them from the sky!

In less than a mile the train would plunge into a tunnel, from which it would emerge to make a sharp curve and run across the spindly Tellier trestle bridge.

Intent on his own game, Vanderberg did not as yet appear to have sighted the Pfalz. Hammond set his lips grimly and shoved the stick forward. The Pfalz keeled into a whistling dive. But before he could get close enough to catch the attention of anyone on the train, the locomotive had plunged into the darkness of the long tunnel.

Hammond pulled out of the dive, searching for Vanderberg. Then he saw it—saw the Hun-piloted Spad come zooming low over the shaky trestle. And something was hurtled downward from the cockpit—something that exploded with a dull roar squarely on the center of the bridge!

THE ancient structure sagged and swayed. Oaths came tumbling up into Hammond's throat, then died there unuttered as he envisioned what was going to happen. Vanderberg *had* bombs! The small twenty pounders had no doubt been hidden in the fuselage of the Pfalz, which was why Vanderberg had landed there this morning, in order to retrieve them.

With the thought reeling through his mind, Hammond was tearing in frantically at the Spad. But he could not arrive in time to prevent the Spad's making one more swoop over the trestle. Again a bomb landed and exploded. And in the center of the bridge appeared a gaping space, sure destruction to the oncoming train!

The Yank knew that the trestle was not visible from within the tunnel. He knew, too, that once the train did round the curve and the engineer saw the danger, it would be too late to halt.

Hammond sent a stream of German-made slugs guttering at Vanderberg's Spad, then whipped viciously in pursuit as the startled Hun swerved aside. Abruptly a plan flashed into the Yank's brain

—a plan that held scant chance of success, but was at least worth trying.

He abandoned his pursuit of the Spad, came around in a wing-wrenching turn. He turned the Pfalz upon one wingtip, and sent it hurtling past the mouth of the tunnel. Again he rolled and whipped the Pfalz past the tunnel opening so close to the earth that the wingtip scraped the cinders.

A hail of tracer slammed down upon him as he came around for the third circuit and he knew that Vanderberg had devined his plan. He made that final flashing dive under a hail of slugs.

From the tunnel came the screech of brakes, and as Hammond shot the Pfalz helling up at the Spad, the locomotive poked its black snout from the tunnel—and stopped! A wave of triumph gripped the Yank. The engineer had understood!

The next split-second, slugs were tearing through the Pfalz' wings—slugs that came from the ground! Hammond looked down. A machine gun had been hurriedly set up on the locomotive's tender, and he saw that weapon spit gutting spats of flame and smoke. He smiled grimly. Of course, the train guards considered him a German.

They were shooting at him—trying to help Vanderberg, their apparent defender! The irony of the situation tightened Hammond's nerves. He forced himself to disregard the fire from the ground, to concentrate on Vanderberg.

Twice the German had held the Pfalz directly under his gun, and now the sturdy Boche crate was groaning in protest. Hammond swept into a loop, turned it into an Immelmann, and came shrieking in at Vanderberg's left side. The Spandaus chattered, adding their greasy tracer trail to the swirling fog of dawn.

The German twisted away, handling his

stolen ship with consummate skill. Sweat broke out on Hammond's strained face and mingled there with the grime of oil and powder smoke. A slug ripped the strap of his helmet, tearing it from his head. Lead pounded into the instrument panel, pounded through glass and wood and fabric. But the motor of the Pfalz did not cease its steady drone, nor did the Spandaus stop their defiant, staccato challenge.

Abruptly a new note struck upon Hammond's consciousness, tearing his hot gaze away from the cocarded ship of his foe. Out of the gray sky came four plummeting shapes —shapes that bore tri-colored cocardes! Nieuports! Hammond experienced a quick sense of relief, which died instantly as the Nieuports swung toward him—and he recalled that his ship bore the ominous black crosses of Germany!

The first concentrated gust of steel from the plunging Nieuports nearly smashed the Pfalz from the sky. Hammond fought down an impulse to turn his own guns on the French ships, and held grimly to the twisting tail of *Hauptmann* Vanderberg.

The words of the prophecy came back to him—a few hours to live! Even though he was doomed, he would take Paul Vanderberg with him! Senseless of the raining death about his head, he shot the tortured Pfalz into a steep dive, eyes fixed on the uprushing helmeted head of the German. His fingers sought the trips, held the triggers down as the last cartridge in the belts shuffled through the breeches.

The proud-winged Spad suddenly shivered, as if struck a mortal blow, and a thin, greasy line connected the Pfalz' Spandaus with the black blob that was Vanderberg's helmeted head. The head jerked under the impact of a pound of lead!



Hammond shuddered as he stared at that crimson blot—shuddered as the uncontrolled Spad went spinning to its certain doom. His hand came up in a halting salute, then he swung, his guns empty, to await calmly the snarling death of the Nieuports.

More ships were rushing in, the drone of their motors rising to a swelling roar. Hammond regarded their coming with contemptuous indifference. A few more guns would matter but little.

Then something familiar in that sight sent new hope flooding through his veins. Hell, these newcomers were not Nieuports! They were Spads! And they bore the markings of 25 Squadron!

The Spads hurtled in swiftly and came storming between the Nieuports and their helpless prey. The arm of Major McDonnell waved the Frenchmen imperiously away as his pilots formed a tight protecting ring about Hammond's staggering crate. Puzzled, the Nieuports drew off and banked into the distance. As Hammond urged the Pfalz gingerly toward home, the last thing he saw was the special train backing slowly back toward Barsette.

"Why did you follow me?" he demanded an hour later. "How did you know? How did you recognize me?"

McDonnell chuckled. "I went into your Nissen, to make sure you'd taken off," he

answered calmly. "I saw that fool good-luck Chinaman of yours on the table. I knew you well enough to be sure that you'd never go out—especially on a job like this—without it. So I looked around and found that someone—Deveaux, no doubt—had liberated Vanderberg. We came a-hellin'. When we recognized that scarf you always wear, the thing was fairly clear. Yeah, I guess that little good luck-charm *did* save your life this time! Now *you* tell *me* how you kept that train from barging out on the trestle!"

"That was simple enough," Hammond grunted. "I knew the engineer couldn't see the trestle from inside the tunnel—couldn't see anything, in fact, but what showed in the circle of light. So I flew that Pfalz wing down past the end of the tunnel three times. I guess he'll tell you that he saw the German Maltese crosses and suspected trouble. Accordingly, he slowed down!"

"So that was it!" McDonnell flung him a sidewise glance. "I hope that now you're all through believing in prophesies. Look at the way this one boomeranged!"

"Did it?" Hammond asked slowly. "I wonder. Deveaux said that one of us would go on to become a great ace and that the other would die! Well, switch that around. Vanderberg died, didn't he? And who knows—maybe I'll be famous yet!"

THE END



ASEMBLIT

by FREDERICK
BLAKESLEE

IN ORDER to meet the demands of many of you sky-hounds, we're throwing in a new feature this month. Legion have been the young men who clamored for a department of this nature, and now we're giving it to you. It's up to you to see what you can do with it.

Building model planes is a fine form of recreation, but we think that it's a bit too simple for the gifted souls who scan these pages, so we're putting on the pressure. Here's a plane-puzzle, and we hope you find the solution, but knowing you as we do, we strongly doubt it.

Here's how to go about this affair. All you need is a piece of tracing paper, a ruler and a pencil—also a bit of imagination. These implements and a flat surface, such as a table, will do the trick. Ready? Let's go! We're working on a Spad 13, and the diagram is on pages 70 and 71.

First, cut out the pages along the dotted line and lay them on the table. Place your tracing paper over sheet "B" and very carefully, using a ruler for the straight lines, trace Figure 1, which is the fuselage of the Spad.

Trace just the solid lines; you can indicate the broken lines very lightly, for the solid line of some other part will fit along that dotted line.

Having done that, you have before you on the tracing paper the *incomplete* fuselage of the plane. The trick is to make of this, with the help of the other pieces, a complete and entire plane.

Now look at Figure 2 on sheet "A." Do you know what it is and where it goes? You're right, surprisingly! It's the stabilizer fin, brace and elevator.

Now place the tracing of the fuselage over Figure 2 so that the solid line of the stabilizer A-A fits on the broken line A-A

of the fuselage. Now trace Figure 2. Now are you beginning to see how it works?

Now place what you have already traced on Sheet "B," Figure 3. This is the vertical fin. The broken line C-C of the vertical fin should fit over the solid line C-C of the stabilizing fin, and line B of the vertical fin should be continuous with line B of the fuselage.

Now you are ready to put on the rudder—Figure 4 on Sheet "B." Line C-C should fit right up against line B-B. And now the tail of the ship is completed.

Figure 5 is next. The last hint you'll get from me is this: Figure 5 is the inter-plane struts and wiring system. You should know where they go, and if you don't, I must say that I don't think much of you as a flying enthusiast. The lower wing is plainly visible, and so is the upper wing. Put them in place.

You shouldn't have much trouble with the rest of the drawing, and if you keep your nose at it long enough, you'll soon have the complete Spad. After all, this is supposed to be a puzzle, and you shouldn't expect us to do the whole thing for you. Get to work.

When you're finished, you'll have a drawing of a Spad 13, in perspective. What to do with it when you're finished? Plenty!

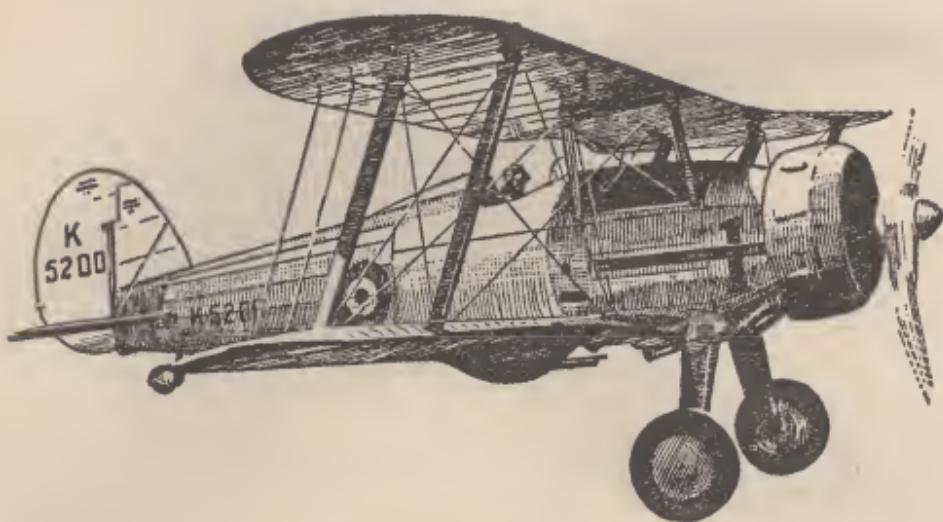
Here's a suggestion: transfer it to drawing paper and ink it in or color it. Since the ship is in perspective, you can arrange it at any angle you see fit. When you have a few of them, it wouldn't be a bad idea to arrange them in a dogfight.

Next month I'll give you a Fokker D V11 to fool with. Then, too, I'll show you how this Spad should look, and I'll offer a few suggestions as to how to ink it or color it.

(See Pages 70-71)

If you were favorably impressed by the above puzzle, or even if you didn't like it, write and let us know your reaction. Address: Asemblit, Popular Publications, 205 East 42nd Street, New York City, N. Y.

Story Behind the Cover



ON THE cover this month you will find a flock of Fairey "Hendons" bombing a big gun emplacement. They've come over just around dusk, when everything is quiet, and they're giving the boys below plenty of hell.

As an escort, they have a flight of Gloster "Gauntlets," those fast, speedy jobs that we've heard so much about recently. One of the most feared types of planes in the world, the "Gauntlet" is a tough baby to mingle with.

But we're not concerned for the moment with the "Gauntlet." We've devoted our attention to the nearest plane, the one without the streamlined pants on the wheels. It's a "Gladiator" and gentlemen, what a job!

The "Gladiator" is a development of the "Gauntlet" and it's really a better ship. You will notice that the "Gauntlet" is a two-bay wing job. Well, the designers saw fit to make the "Gladiator" a single-bay ship, and I think they were right.

Another deviation from the "Gauntlet"

is the single-strut cantilever undercarriage. They constructed these babies so that they'd *last* and this single-strut business is a testimonial to their confidence.

When it comes to throwing steel around the sky, the "Gladiator" can take fine care of itself. Its armament consists of four machine guns, and they speak a language of their own. Personally, I wouldn't want to speak with any of them.

When you talk about power, the "Gladiator" must be considered. In its motorbed is a Bristol "Mercury IX," a nine cylinder radial job. This power-house is air-cooled and supercharged, and when you give it a bit of throttle it goes places!

Do you want speed? This baby will do 255 m. p. h. at 14,500 feet, and it has a service ceiling of 32,800 feet.

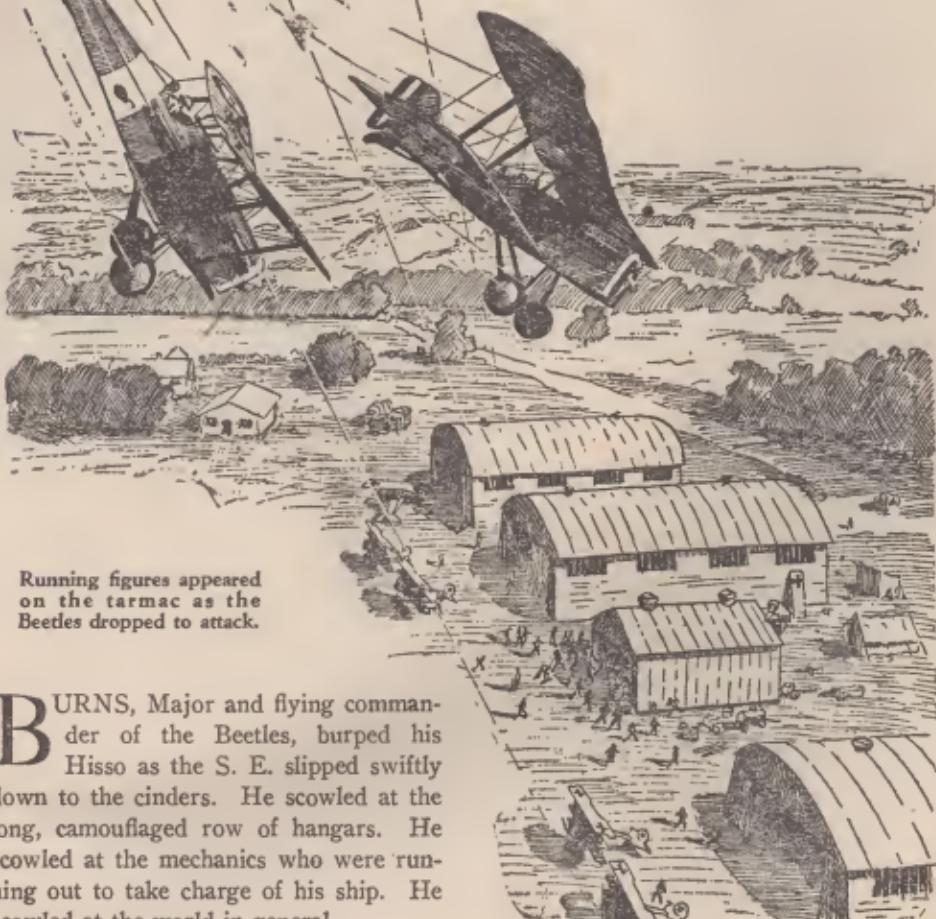
The "Gauntlet" isn't far behind in performance. It's equipped with a Bristol "Mercury V. I. S.," another radial, air-cooled engine. It boasts of speed of 230 m. p. h. at 15,500 feet and has a service ceiling of 33,500 feet.

Frederick Blakeslee.

Blood for a Fledgling

by WILLIAM PORTER

It was proud air where the Beetles flew, for the Beetles were Kings of the sky lanes; they flew with a daring as great as the sky, and they had no place for Toby Smith. But in their pride they failed to see the heart that beat within a kiwi's chest; they did not learn till the fight was done—that courage wears many masks!



Running figures appeared on the tarmac as the Beetles dropped to attack.

BURNS, Major and flying commander of the Beetles, burped his Hisso as the S. E. slipped swiftly down to the cinders. He scowled at the long, camouflaged row of hangars. He scowled at the mechanics who were running out to take charge of his ship. He scowled at the world in general.

Not that he was irritated with the Beetles. To the contrary, the Major was quite confident that he was the leader of the toughest, flyingest, fightingest bunch on the front. The Beetles were kings of the air. Men all over France knew the S. E. 5s that bore for an insignia the simple, black silhouette of a beetle, and likewise, they knew the dare-devils who wore the white helmets with the tiny outline of a beetle stamped upon them. The Beetles were good; the Major was proud of them. And so, despite the fact that the scowl seemed to be directed at the roost of his hellions, Burns was not irritated with the Beetles.

Burns was irritated because he was worried. For months the Beetles had been ruling the sky-lanes in tranquillity, but now tragedy had struck the outfit. Wilson, leader of the dawn patrol and one of the original group, had been battered down and killed in Germany. Now they were sending a replacement. Burns was doubtful as to that replacement, for the Beetles were made of real stuff—stuff that most rookies don't have.

He was soon to find out, for Jackson, top sergeant of the mechanics, trotted up beside the plane as it slowed down and yelled in his ear:

"That replacement got in while you were at that Staff meeting. He's over in your office."

"Thanks," said the Major. "What does he look like?"

Jackson shook his head doubtfully.

"I—I dunno, chief. You better go talk to him."

Burns hefted his legs out and strode over to the little building that housed his office and the armory. So the replacement was in, eh? The Major kept hoping that Jackson's doubts were unfounded. Well, he'd soon see. He shoved open the door.

A pink-cheeked, grinning boy with slicked-down hair and blue eyes sprang

up from a chair and clicked his heels. His uniform was pressed until his whip-cords had a knife-crease along their length; his buckles shone; his boots shimmered; the holster at his side glistened. In fact, Tobias Smith, recently of ground school, looked like a little tin aviator.

Burns frowned in disapproval as he walked over and flung himself into his chair behind the littered desk.

"Tobias Smith?"

"Yes, *sir!* People usually call me 'Toby,' however."

Burns did not seem to be particularly enthralled by this bit of information, but he stretched out his hand and said:

"I'm Burns, commander of your outfit. Grab a chair, come over and sit down, and I'll tell you what you're up against."

The hand that was extended to him was soft, baby-pink, and was tipped with neatly done nails. When the replacement sat down he carefully hoisted his pant-legs to keep the knees from bagging.

With a few words and considerable profanity, Burns told him of the situation—all about Wilson's death, and how the toughened, hardened Beetles felt as if they had lost a gutty blood-brother.

"So you see, Smith, you've got a tough job coming up. It's gonna take one hell of a man to fill the place in this gang that Jimmy held. He was a guy in our bunch—and we've been practically the same since the formation of the squadron—well, we were just all tied up in him. He could fly like the devil, too. Nobody's got any hard feelings, see; so don't get huffy when I tell you we just figger you can't be what Wilson was."

"This bunch is tough; they have been through a year and a half of Hell together; they live, think, breathe, and feel together. Wilson was a part of their life. They were with him twenty-four hours a day. You're a stranger—part of a dressed-up clan that usually can't fly

worth a darn and for which they have only contempt. This bunch, fella, knows what rookies are—and it remembers what Wilson was. You got a damn tough job. I wish you luck—but I'm afraid it's not enough."

The replacement squirmed and frowned.
"You're very encouraging."

"Maybe you think I hadn't ought to have told you this. What difference does it make? You're gonna see what attitude these fellows are taking toward you, and I might as well warn you."

Smith did see that attitude when he walked into quarters. The morning patrol was just in, and the men were chattering idly about the Bluenoses, crack squadron across the lines. The talk stopped immediately, however, when Toby appeared.

"Hello, fellows!" he piped.

No one answered for a moment, then a tall, hawk-beaked fellow—Boone, Toby discovered later—swung around and said:

"Hello!"

Not another member of the group even raised his eyes.

"And what was Heinie up to this morning?" queried the newcomer cheerfully.

No answer.

"Kinda rough upstairs, wasn't it?"

Again no reply. Toby looked surprised for a moment, then pulled up a chair and sat down. Flashing his most effusive, good-fellow grin, he said:

"Boy, you guys are sociable. What's the matter—what'd I do? After all, I didn't shoot down old—er—what's his name!"

The tall man flushed, kicked his chair back, and, staring hard at Smith, spoke in hard, jerky words.

“WILSON was his name! Wilson! And listen, kiwi, be careful of the



way you talk about him. When the bloomin' Dutch got him they got one of the guttiest, smartest, flyingest men that ever kicked a rudder! He meant more to us than a billion of your magazine-cover variety can ever mean. I suppose the story book guys might even say we 'loved' him. And you, a slick-headed cake-eater with purty wings and a Sam Browne belt, come in, cocky as the devil, sit down in his chair, take his place in the V, take his bunk, and—and then wisecrack about it."

He paused, then leaned forward and said with slow emphasis:

"Lissen, fella—we don't like you! And what's more, we hope to hell you don't like us."

He looked the rookie over with piercing, steely eyes. He took in every detail of the shiny new uniform; the shiny boots, the carefully polished rookie's cross-belt. Then he shook his head in disgusted pity and said slowly:

"And you're to fill the best boots on the front. Lord help the Beetles!"

There was a murmur of assent from the rest of the men. Toby stood, open-mouthed, for a moment, then gasped:

"Well, of all the guts—!"

Infuriated, he swung his fist at the jaw of the speaker. The arc of his arm was stopped abruptly when Boone reached out and grabbed his wrist. Holding Toby as he would a struggling child, he silently shook his head in disgust and pity. Someone said:

"Better not, pretty boy!"

The tall man dropped the replacement's arm as Burns rushed in. The Major was strapping on his white helmet excitedly.

"Grab your stuff, buzzards. Tripes heading this way, and it's damn sure they ain't hunting a picnic spot! In the air, every man of you!"

The field alarm began to shriek. He turned to the replacement.

"Smith, get a fire extinguisher and try to be useful."

"Thank you, but I'm going up."

"You stay down here or I'll—oh, go on! But I'm telling you, it's against my good judgment. These Bluenoses aren't so hot at ball-room dancing—" this with a significant glance at the kiwi's polished boots—"but they're hellions in the air!"

By the time Smith was in the cockpit of his S. E. the Germans were almost over the field. He could hear the chatter as they warmed up their Spandaus. He yelled to the mechanics to let go, and then felt the ship lift her tail when he touched the throttle. Burns and two others were already in the air, and the remainder of the squadron was scudding over the tarmac. It was now or never.

The Hisso snorted as he picked up speed. He hoisted her tail and felt the ship's wheels go light. No need to pull off so quickly, he thought; better be sure of air speed, first. Unconsciously his mind checked over a ritual of inspection. She was revving over okay; the oil was warm; the belts were full—his thoughts were interrupted by something that pinged viciously around his ears, and he looked up.

Bearing down on him, flying almost level so as to meet him head-on, was a blue-nosed tripe. The German was flying at an absurdly low altitude, and evidently had all intentions of ramming him. This was a spot! No time for maneuvering, as his wheels were just lifting. Smith swore, but the nose of the Fokker loomed bigger and bigger and the guns snarled in his face. Suddenly he lost his head and cold sweat broke out on his lip. His brain screamed that the Dutchman was going to ram him! Frantically he grabbed the stick and pulled it back into his lap. He would have to lift the plane over that tripe—

The S. E. stood on its tail, losing speed every second. Then Toby realized the folly of his maneuver. He had done exactly what the German wanted him to do—left his belly wide open, hanging almost motionless by the nose, waiting for the Boche to blow the pit out! He closed his eyes. The S. E. shook as lead bored and ate into the fuselage; the Fokker came in and in. The ship was being battered to pieces, and slugs tugged at his tunic. Then, at a point when collision seemed inevitable, the German spun around delicately on a wing tip, gave him a final smashing burst, and roared up and away.

Toby groaned with relief. Then he suddenly realized that the Hisso had conked. The S. E., with remarkable stability, was mushing down, but the hard tarmac was only dozens of feet below him! He knew what would happen. She would hit on her belly in a gigantic pancake, crushing the cockpit and smashing the fuselage to bits. A crash, where they pulled you out with a broken back, or a bashed-in skull!

He fought the stick and glanced overside. The S. E. had flopped forward and swung her nose down. The tarmac was twenty—fifteen—ten feet away from his pale face! He pulled the stick back as far as it would go and flung his hands over his face. Wood snapped and crashed hideously; metal clanged and rasped—and everything went black.

He was in his bunk when he came to. Only Burns was within sight. Toby groaned. His head was circling and looping, and his body ached viciously, but he was evidently not seriously hurt. He sat up.

The Major was watching him with a disgusted scowl on his face.

"Yeah, Algernon, you did it!" he said quietly. "You did it. You acted against the advice of your commanding officer. You waited till everybody was in the air.

You tried to take off into the business end of a tripe. You lost your head, and stood on your tail, and let a Heinie blow your guts out. You let him chew the Hisso into scrap iron. Then you mush back on the cinders, practically without getting into the air, and smash a dam' precious crate all to little bits. And *you* get a bump on the head and a busted helmet."

He shook his head.

"Fella, you are a *real* Beetle. Wilson was never as good as all *that!* And listen, sweetheart—the boys are just cr-a-a-a-z-y about you now!"

And Major Burns, commander of the Beetles, turned on his heel and walked out, swearing profusely.

TOBY growled in his throat as he sipped vile-smelling cognac in the little *estaminet* in Lusite. He was decidedly out of humour. Fearing to hunt company, he had parked himself alone at a corner table and sat moodily frowning into his liquor. The Beetles, he decided, were rather inhospitable. Of course, it was only natural that they should feel rather hostile to a newcomer who was to take the place of a long-time buddy, but they didn't have to treat him as if he were the Crown Prince and poison ivy at the same time. That case of buck fever and the crackup hadn't helped matters, either.

He became aware that the men at the next table were engaged in heated conversation, and edged a little nearer.

"I'm telling you, captain," one of them was saying, "this new crate is going to fly wings around anything we have! Our agents are of absolutely no help, either. The plane is being kept under cover extremely well."

"But, sir, can't you find anything on it?"

"All we know is that it is some kind of drastically improved Fokker."

"Fokker?"

"Yes, we're sure of that, at least. I suppose they'll call it the D-8."

"Mmmm! And it will really fly, eh?"

"My dear captain, did you *ever* see a Fokker that wasn't about two jumps ahead of anything else on the Front? Why, man, the D-7s are still a match for any of our ships, and those confounded tripes are in some ways better. Listen, Billings, I'd better shut up—this is no place for an officer to go blowing off. But confidentially, I'd bet even money that this new D-8 will be one of the finest war crates ever built."

The speaker, who wore the stripes of a major, banged the table with his fist.

"Dammit, Billings, if we could only get hold of one of those ships!"

The conversation shifted, and Toby went back to the cognac. More trouble, he thought. Oh well, he doubted if he would still be flying when the D-8 hit the Front. Burns would probably have him court-martialed before then.

The next morning dawned cloudy, but before the dawn patrol was in, the sun was shining brightly and a light breeze had sprung up. The men were gathered in front of a hangar, smoking and dishing out the customary small talk. Toby sat apart from the group, slowly cleaning his revolver. They were waiting for final orders on the morning crossing.

They were wheeling out another S. E.—a rebuilt job. His had been smashed almost beyond repair. Toby rose, dusted off his clothes, and walked over to the ship which he supposed would be his new plane. A flush mounted his cheeks as he glanced at the fuselage. It bore no insignia on the side. The spot usually occupied by the black beetle was conspicuously white. Burns had had the squadron insignia painted off the ship!

At the moment, the Major was walking across the field.

"Smith!" he yelled.

When Toby approached, the officer extended something in his right hand.

"Here's a helmet. Yours was ruined in your—er—accident."

Toby noted with sinking heart that the helmet was the regulation brown leather. The outstanding mark of the Beetles was their white helmets stamped with the black silhouette of a beetle. They were going out of their way to be nasty!

Burns, seemingly reading his thoughts, grimaced and said:

"Wondering why it's not white, huh? You have no right to a white one, Smith. You have to earn it."

Toby flushed. By this time the men had gathered around them, preparatory to receiving orders. Burns turned and spoke to the group at large.

"Gentlemen, we are going to Germany. To be more specific, we are going to drop in on the Bluenoses." He turned to Toby. "The Bluenoses are the tripes that were here yesterday, Geraldine."

The rookie winced at the epithet, but stared stonily ahead.

"We'll go over and do as much damage as possible. Get into your ships. If you're wondering whether or not you're flying today, Smith, you are. Maybe the Dutch will keep you for a pet. Please try to keep from smashing the S. E., however. We may need it before the war's over."

Someone snickered. Burns eyed Toby with a queer smile, and murmured, almost to himself:

"We been riding you a lot, kid. Maybe—oh, get into your ships! Let's go!"

Moments later the gutted landscape was rolling away beneath Smith's wheels, and before long the gray oblong that was the roost of the Bluenoses was looming on the horizon. He glanced down at Burns, in leader position. The Major was already warming up his guns. The fun was about to begin.

They were still some little distance from the field when running dots began to appear on the tarmac. No doubt, thought Toby, the alarm is being sounded. Men scurried across the field from gray barracks to pull open the hangar doors. Three or four had climbed into each of the sunken field machine gun pits. One of the Fokkers was already turning over, and others were being wheeled out.

Smith directed his attention to the far side of the field, where a small group of Germans were fiddling with another plane. As the Beetles appeared, this strange plane was turned about, and instead of being sent into the air, it was taxied back into a small metal hangar set apart from the field. Toby gazed in wonder. Now what the devil—? Of course! This was the new mystery ship the brass hats had been gabbing about back in Lusite—the new Fokker D-8! They had been preparing to send it up for a test jaunt across the lines when the Beetles' surprise had tossed a wrench into the works. Toby tried to get a glimpse of the new ship. He only had time to see that it was a monoplane, for at that moment Burns wagged his wings and, motor screaming, hurled his S. E. down in a plummeting dive.

Toby kicked the throttle open with the palm of his hand and shoved the stick forward. The Hisso howled in his ears. He jogged the trips and heard the Vickers "pr-r-r-r-up! pr-r-r-up!" The guns were ready. Down, down went the S. E. The wind hurt his ears, but he kept his nose on the tail of the ship ahead. It seemed almost as if the struts would pull out. Then they began to flatten.

SIMITH saw a Fokker slithering down the runway. Ah-ha! He decided to find out what happened to other people when *they* were dived on in the middle of a take-off! He broke away from the already spreading formation of the Beetles

and slipped down almost to the ground. Then he slammed directly at the oncoming German!

The situation was curiously like that of yesterday, only now *he* was holding the whip hand. His gloved fingers squeezed the trips. Little red lines appeared at the muzzles of the Vickers and long blue streaks of tracer stretched out toward the triplane. He held the ship directly on the nose of the Boche. The Fokker, however, refused to zoom upward in that fatal stall and open its belly. It stuck close to the sod, roaring at him wide open. Toby kept pouring lead, like a gardener watering pansies. Closer, closer—! When it seemed that the bellowing motors would fling the two together in a mass of twisted rags and steel, Toby tugged back the stick. The wires shrieked in torture as the final stream of lead snarled across the Fokker's nose, and then the Beetle zoomed over the German to higher air and comparative safety.

Smith whirled his ship into a climbing turn and prepared for more fight, expecting the tripe to be well on its way upstairs to meet him. Then he was able to see it again. That Bluenose would never take the air again! It was running mad, and long streamers of oily smoke were boiling from it. Then the fuselage plumped flames, and the burning wreck skidded off the end of the tarmac to roll down the gentle slope, spewing flames and charred wood. One down!

But this was no time for crowing. Toby swung around, back into the fight. By now the air was full of blue-nosed triplanes, milling madly around in a dervish dance with the S. E. 5s of the Beetles. One of the Huns went swerving down, the pilot nailed to the fire-wall with the hot slugs from Burns' guns. Smith gasped with admiration as the gutty leader of the Beetles shot up in a dizzying *chandelle*

to train his guns on another of the Germans. That was a flyer!

Then, in a flash, Burns was the victim and not the victor. A murderous fire, coming seemingly from nowhere, centered on the cockpit of his ship. The streamered wings of the S. E. wavered. Toby looked frantically about him to find the attacking ship. Burns might ride him hard, but he wasn't going to let a Heinie kill the man outright! Then the rookie saw the source of the searing lead. The heavy machine gun in the sunken field pit! The German gunners were having a high time, potting at the Beetles like skeet shooters at clay pigeons.

Like a shot, Toby whirled his sturdy ship around and dived for the death-dealing nest. The murderous fire turned toward him immediately. Again he heard the now familiar ping of m. g. slugs bouncing off the cowl; again lead whispered a serenade of death in his ears. But no buck fever this time! He set his jaw and kept his dive. He was very low before he began to fire. Then Toby pulled the trips back and held them. The Vickers rained into the machine gun pit, but slugs from the ground were grinding through the flooring. His oil gauge was blasted before his eyes. The black liquid squirted toward him. He wiped the stuff from his goggles with one hand, while the other continued to squeeze the trips.



The pit was rushing up at him; he was only yards above it now, hurtling almost straight down with the speed of a bullet. The Vickers were boiling hot; gun smoke and the stench of powder seared his nostrils. Still the lead rolled from his guns. Then the fire from the machine gun pit stopped. He pulled up, and glanced overside while the wires howled with the strain of the abrupt zoom. The men in the pit lay dead, twisted strangely over their gun.

He flattened again, and started for the other pit across the field. This time it was easier. Instead of the dive, he fish-tailed in, swinging his nose and cutting little twists to disturb the aim of the gunners. When he was almost on top the nest, he pushed down, smacked open the throttle, and swept the pit with fire as he flashed by. Then a sharp bank, and he was ready for a sweep from the opposite direction.

But there was no need for another attack. The remaining men had left their gun and were fleeing for the shelter of the brush that flanked the field. Toby chased them with lead, kicking dust around their feet and knocking some of them into the dirt. Now the two pits held only the dead, and the heavy guns were silent.

Toby climbed slowly, breathing hard. Someone shot by him and wagged his wings. It was Burns, who grinned and clasped his hands delightedly over his head. Toby grinned back. Maybe these guys were beginning to like him!

He swung about leisurely and hung on the outside of the fight, taking momentary time out. Then his gaze suddenly hit upon the little metal hangar, set apart on one side of the field. The new German crate! In the heat of the fight, the Beetles had forgotten it. The hangar doors were open, and Toby could see inside the faint glistening of the shiny new fabric. Why not—

With Toby Smith, to think was to act. He eased up on the throttle and sailed slowly over the little hangar. Two guards were still in front of the mystery plane, watching the fight and pointing excitedly into the air. He turned sharply and shot back over them, peppering the ground with slugs as he went by. Nothing happened. He circled again, then one of the two pulled the stunt Toby had been waiting for. He pulled his rifle up and took a pot-shot at the S. E.

Smith immediately nosed down, swerving crazily. It was a long chance, but if he could make that Dutchman think that he had been hit by a rifle shot, he might be lucky enough to get that D-8! He circled and lunged crazily over the hangar again, hoping to draw another shot. He did. The guard again pulled the Mauser to his shoulder and let fly. Toby stood up in the pit, grabbed dramatically at his chest, and flopped back against the seat, apparently stone dead.

NOW his problem was to fake the crash. A touch on the stick flattened him for a pancake landing. He pulled the nose up, cut the switch, and dropped the S. E. hard. She hit with a grinding of wood and metal. His landing gear folded up like paper, and the bottom wing ripped into sticks and spread canvas on the rough ground behind the little hangar. Toby sat still and waited, slumped down in the pit to give the appearance of a corpse.

There was a pause, filled with the bellowing of motors and stuttering gasps of Vickers and Spandaus. Then the two guards appeared around the corner of the hangar, heading toward his plane at a trot. They carried their rifles at alert. Toby slipped the Colt from his holster, cautiously keeping his hand under cover. The Germans were talking excitedly.

"Ah! Hans, Hans, you did it! Gott! You shot down an *Amerikaner*! With your Mauser, like a duck!"

"Jahwol! And a Beetle! One of those sky terrors! Jah!"

They were within easy distance. Cautiously Toby raised his hand and slipped the muzzle of the Colt up to rest on the side of the pit. The guards were still talking exultantly.

"And Hans, you should get a Cross for this!"

"Jah! Der Commander will be proud of me!"

Toby measured with his eye the distance between the plane and the guards. Twenty paces. Easy. He squeezed the trigger. Hans, the would-be pot-shotter, crumpled back on the turf. The other choked out a curse and tried to pull up his rifle. Toby shot up from the pit like a jack-in-the-box and snapped a shot from the waist. The German staggered, started to yell for help. Swiftly, sharply the Colt spoke, and the second man toppled.

Smith crawled from the cockpit. The din skyside had made the revolver shots indistinguishable. No one was in sight. Silently, he slipped up behind the little hangar that housed the D-8. There was no one in sight. He scurried along the side, up to the front.

This was the worst spot in the whole business. He had to twist around that corner and duck into the hangar. If anyone saw him, every field man on the place would be on his neck. He did not allow himself to think of that possibility, but spun on his heel and ducked inside.

The hangar was empty of men. He gazed in admiration at the plane before him. The D-8 was a tiny, stocky monoplane with a cantilever wing set above and in front of the cockpit. New Spandaeus glistened on the cowl, and he noticed the belts were full. His gaze wandered along the length of the plane. What a ship! Neat, and extremely business-like. He recalled the words of the brass hat—"did you *ever* see a Fokker that wasn't about two jumps ahead of anything on the Front?" The D-8, Toby surmised, would live up to expectations. And would the Allied engineers like this as a present!

He spun the prop over. The motor was still a little warm from the tuning-up the mechanics had been giving it when the Beetles arrived. The Oberursel caught readily and ticked contentedly. Toby slipped up to the front of the hangar and glanced at the field. It was almost empty,

except for a few mechanics at the opposite end. All attention was focused on the whirling battle in the air. So far, so good.

He climbed into the cockpit. Not enough time to taxi out on the tarmac, he knew, and therefore decided to make a run of it straight from the hangar. A touch on the throttle and the D-8 began to move, and then he was scudding over the tarmac. The Oberursel sang her deep-throated song of speed, and the plane shot swiftly over the field. His wheels were lifting when a slug whistled by. The field men had seen him—but it was too late, for he was already in the air!

Toby yelled in exultation as he eased back on the stick. The D-8 shot upward as if on an invisible wire. The sheer loftiness of the climb took his breath away. The S. E. 5 was noted all over France for its delicacy and maneuverability—but it was a lumbering baby carriage compared to this! He gained more altitude, and circled back to see the finish to the dog-fight over the field of the Bluenoses.

The Beetles were living up to their reputation. All Hell broke loose in the face of the German squadron. Two triples shot earthward to crush their pilots as he watched. A tent hangar spurted fire and oily flames shot along the entire row of buildings. The Beetles were all over the place. Diving, looping, screaming, they were driving the Boche against the wall. And, as an admiring rookie watched, the last of the Bluenoses turned tail and fled deep into Germany. Their one-time base was a shambles. The Beetles had "dropped in"—and settled the score in full!

Toby watched as the squadron fell again into formation and circled the field, and a puzzled expression came on his face as he saw them go stair-stepping down to the hangars. What were they up to? Then he saw. One by one the Beetles filed past the wreckage of his S. E.,

saluting with uplifted hand the empty cockpit of his ship. The Beetles, along with the two German soldiers, thought the gallant fledgling had died in that last plunge of the battered little ship—and they paid their tribute.

Toby shot upward. He didn't want to be seen yet, and so hung in the air, lurking behind a cloud while the squadron gunned up and headed home. He intended to take the D-8 home, true enough, but if he could—! His cheeks brightened with anticipation as he touched the stick. In a moment he was high above the formation of the Beetles as they cruised leisurely home. Then the smiling rookie shoved the stick forward and dived for the nose of the V formation.

Major Burns, flying point, was astonished to see a strange ship with German markings come plummeting out of the

clouds and level off in front of him, just out of range. With puzzled eyes he watched the pilot turn around. Then, as an entire squadron looked on, Tobias Smith, recently of the kiwis, gleefully put his thumb to his nose and wiggled expressively his outspread fingers at the purpling face of the Major.

AS Toby walked from quarters the next morning, Burns yelled at him from the other side of the field. The men were already gathered around, waiting for the customary instructions. Toby walked over, somewhat fearful.

Burns grinned sheepishly.

"Smith—er—Toby! We—that is, we—feel— Oh, hell! Take it!"

Toby took it. It was a white helmet, and stamped in bold black on the front was the silhouette of a beetle.

THE END



PLAY BALL!

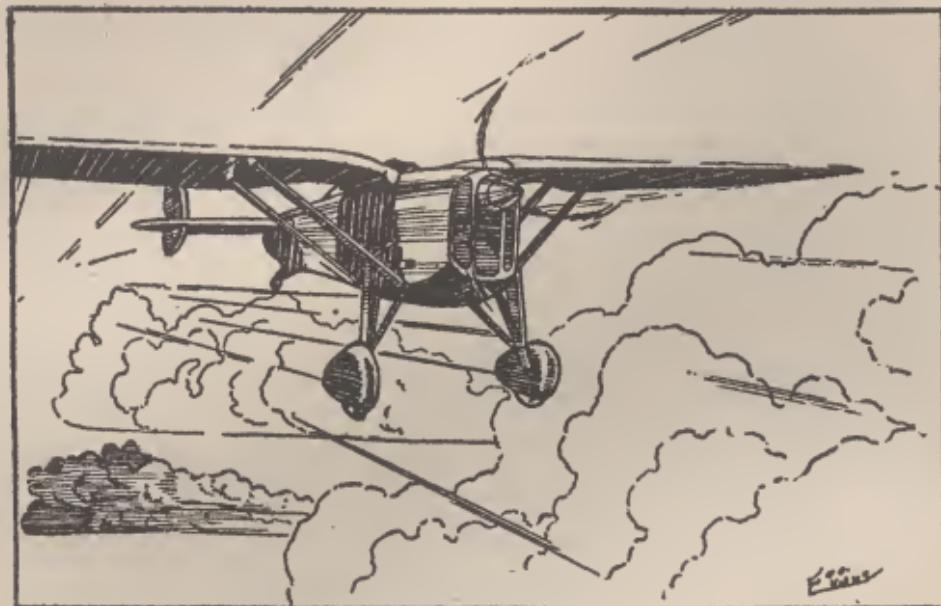
THE editors of Sports Novels Magazine are proud to announce their success in having obtained Carl Hubbell, the National League's greatest pitcher, to tell the story of his baseball career in a smashing, thrill-packed fact article, STRIKE THREE! In addition to this feature there will be included what many critics consider to be the greatest baseball novel ever written by William O'Sullivan, DIAMOND DUST—a classic in sports fiction—together with Ben Peter Freeman's great novel of the prize ring, FIGHTING MAN.

Plus novels and short features on all popular sports.

SPORTS NOVELS

June-July Issue
On Sale
April 30

SKY SECRETS by George Evans



Mureaux 180 C2

WHILE it is true that Germany, by going in for military things in a big way, has set the rest of Europe on its ear, those other nations, in building their own planes, still show the influence of German engineering. In the Mureaux 180 C2, shown above, as well as in the Handley Page which you have seen many times before, we find another set of twin rudders, reminding us of the German Junkers. Just what this will mean to the Mureaux, we don't really know as yet, but in the Junkers K-47 two-seater, it's supposed to help a great deal in staying out of spins, or in saving your neck if you do happen to get absent-minded and fall into one. So it must be a good idea, if all the European powers are impressed enough to copy it.

The 180 C2 is a two-seated fighter of high wing monoplane type, like so many ships of French design. The power plant is the famous Hisso "Moteur Cannon," of 850 h.p. which fires a twenty mm. cannon through a hollow crankshaft. A large flat radiator is used for cooling.

The cockpit of the Mureaux is enclosed in sliding glass panels, while the gunner has a single swivel mounted m.g., set behind a hinged section of the cockpit enclosures to receive the least possible interference from the slip-stream.

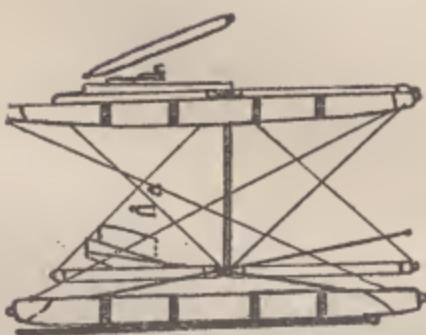
The landing gear is spatted, and the shock absorbers are built into the undercarriage struts. Here are the specifications:

Span	37 feet, 4 inches
Length	25 feet, 7 inches
Height	9 feet, 4½ inches
Weight, empty	2596 lbs.; loaded, 3705 lbs.
Speed	236 m.p.h. (at 16,480 feet)
Ceiling	36,080 feet
Climb	11,400 feet in little more than 4 minutes

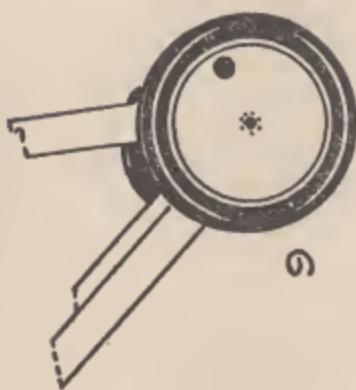
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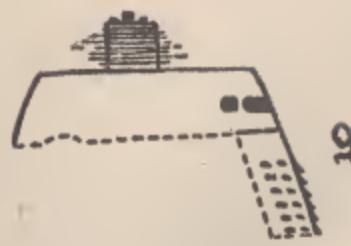
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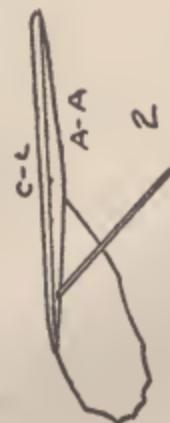
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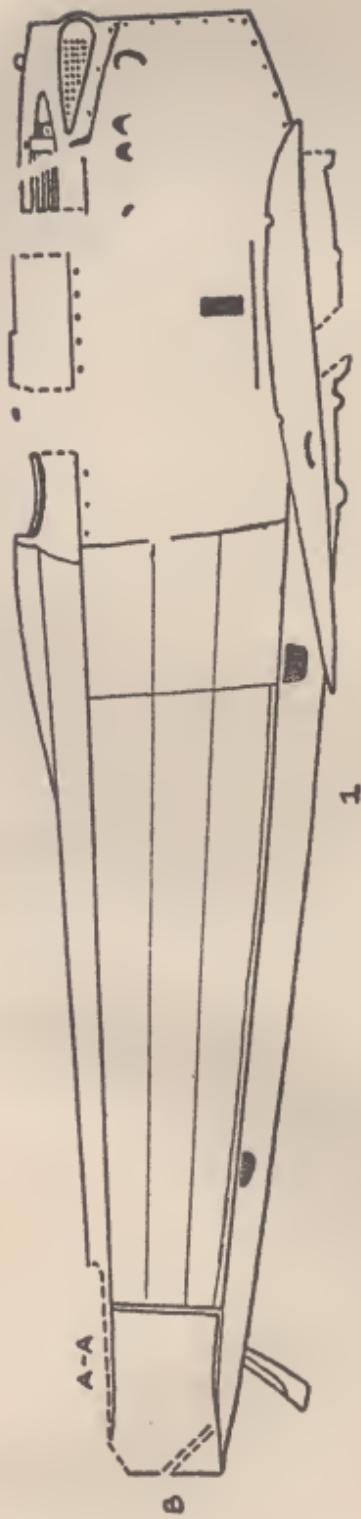
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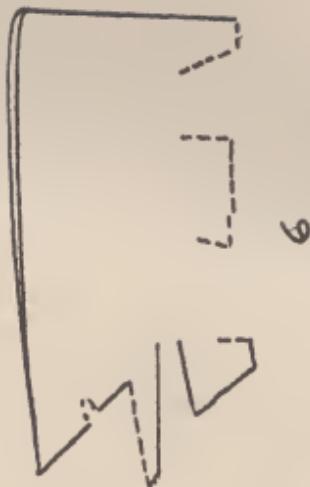
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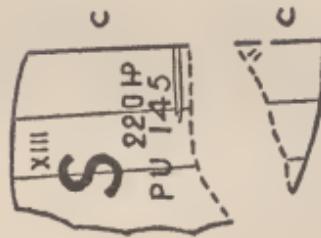


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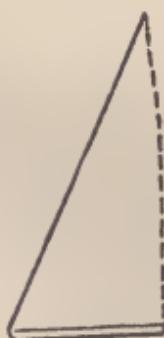


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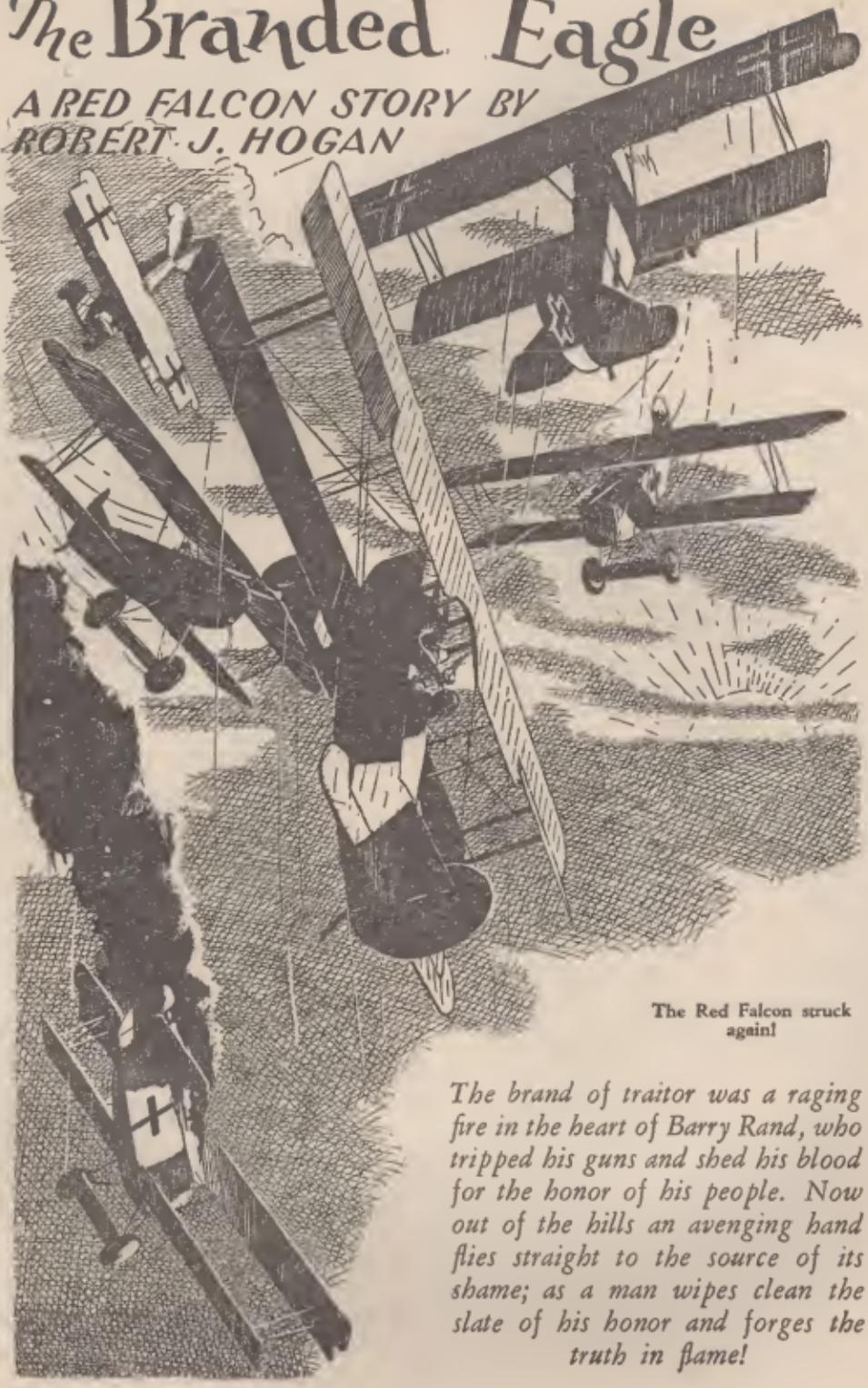
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7

The Branded Eagle

A RED FALCON STORY BY
ROBERT J. HOGAN



The Red Falcon struck
again!

The brand of traitor was a raging fire in the heart of Barry Rand, who tripped his guns and shed his blood for the honor of his people. Now out of the hills an avenging hand flies straight to the source of its shame; as a man wipes clean the slate of his honor and forges the truth in flame!

TWO dark forms climbed from the plane that had just landed, phantom-like, in a field on the edge of Paris. Darkness hid the crimson color of that plane, the only markings of identification that it possessed. There were no concentric circles and no crosses on the wings; that flashing ship needed no such emblems, for it was the blood-red crate of the Red Falcon, the fastest, most-feared thing that ever flew.

But there were times when the Red Falcon forgot temporarily his hatred for the enemy and his lust for battle, and yearned to be among his fellows. And so it was on this night that Barry Rand, the Red Falcon, and Sika, his giant Senegalese chieftain aide, had come down from their inaccessible field on the top of Saar mountain, high in the Vosges range for a night in Paris. Sika spoke anxiously as they left the plane under the protecting shadow of trees and strode toward the nearest road that would lead them to the center of the great French metropolis.

"Master, they catch you—you be shot!" the black warned.

Barry Rand grinned. "Maybe," he admitted. "If they catch me. But there are very few who would recognize me. We've been doing a lot of things, lately, that certainly haven't *annoyed* the Allies! Look at the time that one brass hat offered to make me a colonel, if I'd come back into the air service. I think we've just about reached the time when we can go and come as we please, Sika."

"You not trust too much," Sika warned.

"You're too suspicious, big boy," Rand laughed.

They came to the road and strode down it in silence.

"What time you be back at plane, Master?" Sika asked as they reached the inner sections of Paris where the buildings were set closer together.

"Sometime before dawn," Rand told him. "That's all I can say. We'd better

split up here. Whoever gets back to the plane first will wait for the other one." The Red Falcon slapped his giant aide on the shoulder. "Have a good time, Sika, but don't get drunk."

Sika straightened indignantly.

"Sika never get drunk, Master," he said.

Rand laughed again.

"No, they don't make enough."

From there, the Red Falcon went straight to a little estaminet that he had patronized months before with his squadron mates of the 76th. But that had been before the charge of treason had been framed against him. Since then, he had been an outlaw pilot, fighting a lone war to end a war. Perhaps some of the old gang would be there tonight at Madame Cochet's.

With the characteristic quick glance of the outlaw, Rand's eyes traveled swiftly about the interior of Madame Cochet's place as he pushed open the door. There were several pilots at the near end of the bar that he didn't know. Suddenly, his eyes riveted on the group at the far end. A grin of anticipation came across his face as he saw a gang from his own squadron. There was Jimmy Willis, and Jackson, and Purcell and—his face clouded as the fourth one turned—Gueren, the only one in the old outfit that Barry Rand had reason to hate. He had always suspected that Gueren had been the one who framed him, but he hadn't been able to stay long enough to prove it, even to his own satisfaction.

Jimmy Willis turned and spotted him when he was half way across the room, walking rapidly toward them. Gueren's voice cracked out in the sudden, deathly stillness of the room.

"There's that double-crossing, yellow-bellied traitor!" he snapped. "He's come to join us in a drink—or maybe he expects us to get scared and run because the Red Falcon has come in!"

By now, Barry Rand was standing face to face with Gueren. The latter was a big fellow, perhaps an inch or an inch and a half taller than Rand and a good twenty pounds heavier.

Rand eyed him coldly for an instant, then he cracked out in a voice that was dangerously calm, "I'll give you just five seconds to start telling me what's burning you up, Gueren."

Gueren's hand moved stealthily toward the automatic in his holster. But the Red Falcon's eyes caught that move. The next instant, Rand had lashed out with a measuring left and a flashing right.

At the same time, he barked, "Time's up!"

There was the light, then heavy smack of fists on a jawbone. Gueren was turned half around. His head snapped back, his knees buckled. He tried to grab the bar, but his hands slipped off. His eyes glazed as he settled to the floor.

Not satisfied with that, Rand reached down, grabbed Gueren by the front of his uniform coat, jerked him to his feet, and propped him up against the bar.

"Of all the guys in the United States army," he cracked, "you've got the least reason to crab about me."

With one hand he held Gueren from toppling over and with the other he snatched out the Colt automatic and tossed it across the floor. Gueren was standing on his own legs now. Rand let go of him.

"Put up your hands!" he barked. "If you won't talk, you'll sleep!"

He let go another blow that was the finishing touch for the larger man. Gueren slumped again and stretched out along the bottom rail of the bar and lay still.

Rand's expression and voice softened as he turned to the other.

"I'm sorry to have started all this fuss,

fellows," he said. "I guess I've been sort of lonesome, up there in the mountains. I got kind of a yearning to come down and spend an evening with you birds." He turned to young, likeable Jimmy Willis. "What's the matter with Gueren?" he demanded. "I thought after he had framed me, he'd be satisfied. What's eating him now?"

There was no friendly expression on Willis' usually smiling face.

"If you don't know, Rand," he snapped, "I'm sure I don't." He turned his back deliberately on the Red Falcon and faced the others. "Come on, gang," he said, "this place isn't big enough to hold us and that double-crossing traitor."

The Red Falcon's former pals turned away. With the help of a bucket of cold water furnished by Madame Cochet, they brought Gueren around and half-dragged him out of the place.

Savagely, Rand turned to Madame Cochet, who was standing behind the bar, and ordered a double cognac. Madame Cochet stared back at him and shook her head.

"*Non, Monsieur*, we do not serve traitors here," she said coldly.

Rand stared at her for a moment, then suddenly he burst out, "Listen, Madame Cochet, you knew me before I was framed and you know I wasn't the guilty one. What's turned all the boys against me suddenly? I've seen them since I took to the mountains and they didn't act *this* way. At least Jimmy Willis and Purcell and Jackson were decent to me, the last time I saw them!"

Madame Cochet shrugged her heavy shoulder.

"It is enough!" she said. "If Messieurs Jackson, Purcell and Willis say you are a traitor, you are a traitor! They are very good customers of mine. You stop



a good party *monsieur*. *Monsieur* Gueren was celebrating his return from Germany, and he bought many drinks. *Mais* you have caused enough trouble in my place. Get out! Get out before I call the *gendarmes* and have you arrested!"

IN A blind haze, Barry Rand stumbled out of the place. For hours he wandered about the streets, knowing little of where he went and caring less. That episode in the bar had cut him more deeply than anything he had ever experienced in his life. He had always counted on Jimmy Willis; now there was no one but Sika that he could turn to. Toward morning, the Red Falcon headed back to his ship and found his faithful black waiting there for him.

"Hello, big boy," he said.

Sika stared more closely at him.

"That you, Master?" he demanded.

"That not sound like your voice."

"Forget it, I'm all right," Barry said.

"You not drunk, Master?"

Rand shook his head disgustedly.

"No, but I wish I were," he admitted.

The motor was started, and Sika called through the tube as Barry swung the ship around:

"I found place to get gas and bullets. Everything full now."

The Red Falcon only half heard him.

"Good," he nodded.

After a long silence during which they took the air and droned high over the front, Rand told Sika what had happened.

"Can you think of anything that we've done lately that would make it appear as though we were siding with the Germans?" he demanded.

"No, Master," Sika replied.

The Red Falcon cursed savagely under his breath. Dawn was breaking in the east.

"So we've been fighting on the German side, have we? Okay! Sika, look!" He pointed far ahead to a five-specked form-

ation. "There's a bunch of Fokkers, and by the time we reach them they'll be right over the Yank lines."

"We fight?" Sika asked eagerly.

"Fight? You're damned right we'll fight! We're going to clean up that five-plane flight so fast that it will be a record for all time in air fighting! Get your guns cleared for action, big boy!"

The Red Falcon sent his crimson crate hurling at that mass of Fokkers. His four nose guns barked and stuttered incessantly, and one Fokker burst into flames.

"Got one!" he yelled.

Like a lunatic, he was going after the others. Sika's big bulk was dancing around in the rear cockpit. He swung his Lewis twins like mad and poured savage bursts into the enemy crates.

"Sika get one!" the big black boomed. And then, "Ki-hu-yi!" From his lips burst the wild battle cry of the Wampana tribe.

The stutter of guns was deafening. The third Fokker went down, and the fourth was trying to get away from Rand's guns while the fifth attempted to dive up under that crimson death for a shot at the blind spot. The Red Falcon plane shuddered, with all six guns going mad, and as if by the same burst, both remaining Fokkers blew apart in the air and portions of human bodies, motors, and planes spattered down on the earth.

Now Barry Rand sent his crimson crate plunging down over the trenches, cutting off his motor at frequent intervals while he yelled to the men looking up in the trenches, "See that? We're fighting the Germans! Report that to G. H. Q.! And you'll see plenty more, too!"

At that moment, Sika slapped his master on the shoulder.

"Master, look!" he boomed. "More planes! Yank planes in trouble! We go help?"

"Great!" Rand yelled. "Where?"

"Over to east. Look! You see?"

The Red Falcon sent his crimson plane screaming at that mass of specks. He could see that the battle was not yet on, but it would be a matter of only another second or two. He nosed up his ship and climbed higher.

There were eight Spads below, and from high above at least sixteen Fokkers were diving on them. As they stared, one Spad went down before the first burst of Spandau fire.

"Hurry, Master, before it too late!" Sika yelled.

"I'm hurrying!" Rand flung back. "The Liberty has got all she'll take. Get set! We're going to come down on that mass of Fokkers like a ton of bricks!"

A wild cry of joy burst from the Red Falcon's lips.

"Hey, Sika, look!" he yelled. "You know what outfit those Spads are from? They're the old 76th gang! Boy, talk about an answer to a prayer! Will we show Willis and Jackson and Purcell and that so-and-so Gueren which side we're fighting on!" Raising his voice still louder, Rand called back to Sika, "Give those Heinies hell!"

Closer streaked the Red Falcon plane as another Spad went down, a flaming coffin. Some of the Fokker pilots saw that crimson death dealer tearing after them and tried to pull out.

The six guns of the Red Falcon plane were blazing like mad. Three Fokkers, two of them bursting into flames, started down the road to hell. Another and another pointed into eternity before the Red Falcon's deadly guns as he thrashed his crate about in their midst.

For a moment, the remaining Fokkers forgot all about the Spads and concentrated on a desperate attempt to corner Barry Rand and Sika and trap their red plane in Spandau crossfire. But in less

than thirty seconds the double *staffel* of Fokkers broke and fled in all directions. Meantime, the Spads had taken the first opportunity to break away and head back for their home field.

Rand brought down two more Fokkers in their wild retreat, then he turned his plane out of the fight and droned along over the Front. He was watching the six remaining Spads of the 76th as they flew homeward and Sika could hear him through the tube, speaking as though to himself:

"Maybe the old gang will understand a little better, now."

HE headed for home. During that day, in the cabin atop Saar mountain, Rand tried to get some sleep, but except for dozing off a couple of times, his mind was too tangled with the strange events that had occurred.

Shortly after noon, Sika called him to the edge of the mountain and pointed far off across the battle lines:

"Look through these glasses, Master," he said. "Sika see plane go over and back."

Barry Rand took the glasses and stared. He saw a tiny object on wings—the wings of a Spad—flying back, north of the German lines. For perhaps two minutes he watched it, far off there in the west. He saw it make a circle over what was left of a small town, and then fly back. He shrugged and handed the binoculars to Sika.

"Thanks," he said. "Nice view. I'm going back and either get some sleep or figure out what's screwy in my old outfit."

But again sleep would not come and Rand was no nearer to a solution than he had been before. The sun was lowering in the west as he got up and stretched. He heard the padding of Sika's running feet.

"Master, battle on!" the big black told

him excitedly. "Down near where that plane fly across lines."

The Red Falcon was instantly alert.

"A battle on!" he demanded.

"Yes, Master. Plenty of guns go off."

Barry Rand was already pulling on his helmet and goggles.

"Come on," he said, "let's wind her up!"

Sika was wheeling the Red Falcon plane out from under the trees. Rand was in the front cockpit, testing the controls and tending to the throttle and switch. A few minutes later, with the engine warmed, they sped out across the top of Saar mountain, dropped away into the hidden canyon and zoomed up in the clear two miles from their hiding place.

Barry Rand stared down when they reached the scene of battle, saw Yanks advancing over a narrow area. But on either side, Huns were holding them back.

Suddenly, he cried through the tube, "Look, look, Sika! There are two mounds down there, about a mile apart. The Yanks are advancing between them. Look!"

Sika's booming voice cut in excitedly, "Master, those Yanks getting trapped! Machine guns on those mounds! They mow Yanks down after they get through!"

The Red Falcon hunched over his stick, and with a curse, stuck the nose of his plane down and went screaming to the attack. Already, the chatter of Sika's guns were drowning out his bellowing voice, as he tried to yell:

"Fight, Master, fight! Maybe we too late!"

They were diving at the westward station of machine gun batteries. Their slugs clattered like hail on the metal tops of the pill box nests.

"We aren't making a dent in them!" Barry yelled. "I'd give a lot for some bombs or hand grenades."

He kicked over and headed for the

other mound with its machine gun batteries. He was flying low now, zigzagging, but in the line of machine gun fire. His four nose guns were chattering in the face of those German machine gunners. He silenced two batteries, but slugs from German ground guns were coming so thickly that the Red Falcon was in danger of being cut apart at any second. Bullets clattered and drummed on the crimson crate as the Huns returned the savage fire. One cylinder of the Liberty motor cut out, but they kept on a little longer.

With a savage curse, Rand turned for home. It was useless to go on. The Yanks that had been led into that trap were all dead.

It was dark in the valleys when the Red Falcon landed at his aerie. He sat for a long time smoking and thinking while Sika prepared dinner.

"You're right, Sika," he said. "I think that plane had something to do with this attack. I'm sure of one thing: Those Heinies had information of the Yank attack before it came off and they were prepared to meet it. They had a trap set for them. And I'll bet a hundred francs to a tire full of blowouts that the Spad we saw around noon went over there and dropped the information!"

At the moment, the giant black was turning a large slice of ham in the pan with a huge butcher knife.

"Sika like to get hold of man that fly that Spad," he said, brandishing the big knife.

"So would I," Rand admitted.

When daylight came, Sika was out on the edge of the rimrock, watching through the glasses once more. The sun had been up for perhaps a half hour when the Red Falcon came up to him.

"What are you looking for, big boy?" he asked.

"Sika think maybe that plane come back

like yesterday noon," the big black answered.

"I've been thinking of the same thing," the Red Falcon nodded. "Let's shove off this morning and fly around, high up. We may spot something."

A half hour later, they were circling at fifteen thousand feet above the ruined town of Tanien. The sun was well up in the east, rising like a ball of fire.

Suddenly, the deep, bellowing voice of Sika came through the tube to Rand's ear:

"Master, there ship! Way down below. Sika just see it! It heading now for Tanien!"

Already Rand had spotted it, and now he stared down through his binoculars. It was a new Spad and had no personal insignia as yet. It was flying a little more than a hundred feet and making good time. After it had droned over the town and reached the northern outskirts of Tanien, it turned sharply. There was a flash behind it and a few minutes later, they heard the far-off boom of an explosion.

"Master, that plane bomb something."

The Red Falcon nodded.

"Yeh, but what? Maybe I'm goofy, but I think that building was already half blown apart when the bomb was dropped on it."

"That funny, Master. What you think?"

"Just this," Rand told him. "I'm guessing that the plane has brought over another message to the Germans, telling of another maneuver that the Yanks are going to make! We'll go back and watch for it. I'd like to get a better look at that Spad and the pilot in it—just for reference."

"We shoot him down, Master?" Sika asked.

Rand shook his head.

"No, I don't think we could catch him," he said. "We're three miles away from him. He's already got a good start on us, heading for home. Besides, we haven't got enough evidence to take a chance of shooting him. We'll watch from the mountain."



They did watch for many hours. Again it was Sika who spotted the first signs of trouble.

"Master, what you say maybe come true," he called. "You take glasses, look."

The Red Falcon stared through the binoculars. After one quick glance, he cracked an order to Sika:

"Get the plane started. We're leaving at once."

He saw the Yanks advancing over a fairly wide area, saw Germans running before them, giving ground all too easily.

In less than ten minutes, the Red Falcon plane was roaring off the mountain, down into the canyon, and up at the other end of it again. They thundered toward the spot of attack, but there were planes ahead of them. Barry Rand saw five ships of the 76th strafing the Germans as they retreated before the Yank advance. A mass of Fokkers came snarling down from the clouds above, and the battle was on.

Then something changed that dogfight abruptly. The ground along the whole area beneath them suddenly heaved up. There were blinding flashes as mines, that the Huns had placed there beforehand, were touched off. Yanks who had come through on the advance—hundreds of them—were blown to bits.

One of the Spads was caught in a blast and crashed wide open. The Red Falcon was fighting Fokkers and trying to chase back the men of his own outfit at the same time, for they could do no good by staying. They were far outnumbered.

Now that their work was done, the Fokkers turned back. The Hun reserves had rushed over the ground, after killing hundreds of Yanks, to retake the area they had given up temporarily.

BARNEY RAND sat in front of his cabin, back on Saar mountain, his head buried in his hands. Sika touched him on the shoulder.

"Master, you not feel bad," he said. "We get that new Spad, that tell Germans what Allies going to do."

The Red Falcon nodded savagely.

"You're damn right we'll get him!" he said. "We'll take no chances. We'll blow him higher than a kite!"

Some time later, the drone of a far-off plane grew rapidly louder. From the edge of the clearing, the Red Falcon watched it come nearer, heading directly for the top of Saar mountain. It zoomed, circled.

At the sound of the motor, Sika came darting out of the cabin. Rand was staring at the plane, open-mouthed, his brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"Look," he gasped, pointing up. "It's one of the old gang. It's an old Spad from the 76th."

As he spoke, the plane turned toward the other end of the mountain top and came in to land. It was an old plane, battle-scarred and oil-soaked. The pilot's face was hidden from the Red Falcon by helmet and goggles, but as he ran toward the ship, the pilot climbed out and tore off the goggles.

Instantly, the expression of the Red Falcon's face changed, for he recognized Gueren. He stared at him in astonishment. Gueren was grinning at him.

"It's me all right," he said. "Don't look as though you're gazing at a ghost. Listen, old man, I'm sorry for everything. You've got to believe me!"

"You dirty, double-crossing, yellow-bellied rat!" Rand snapped. "I wouldn't

believe you under oath. I don't know what you've come here for, but it's a useless trip. Get out before I kill you!"

Sika was towering beside the Red Falcon.

"Listen, Barry," Gueren pleaded, "there's one thing I want to get straight before I go into what brought me here. I didn't frame you, although you always thought I did. It was someone else who framed you months ago. He died today and confessed that he did it to save his own skin!"

"Who?" Rand demanded. "Who are you talking about? There wasn't a bird in the whole outfit outside of you who would do a dirty thing like that."

"And I'll tell you," Gueren raced on, "what all that stink was about in Madame Cochet's place. We got a report that afternoon, from a couple of Frogs, that they had seen you helping the Germans in a fight and we believed them. But we've found out since that it was a lie. We're sorry as the devil."

He took a step nearer to the Red Falcon.

"Listen," he pleaded. "will you do me one favor? For the next minute, will you forget the past—let by-gones be by-gones—and listen to what I'm going to tell you? We need you back, Barry! We need you and your ship and your aide. Maybe you've noticed how we've been catching hell lately. The old 76th is all shot to pieces. Heinie has taken us for a ride that's been—well, it's been terrible. There's only four of the originals left—me and Jackson and Purcell and Willis. We've got the toughest patrol of our lives tomorrow morning. Special orders are coming in. Will you come down and join us, at least for this raid? If you'll promise to do that, I'll tell you who it was who framed you."

Gueren looked desperately sincere. Rand was eyeing him coldly, but inside

he was thawing out. Purcell, Jackson, and Willis were three swell guys, after all, and buddies of his all the way through from training school. Gueren repeated the clinching phrase:

"We need you down at the 76th, Barry."

Rand gave a short nod in the affirmative.

"Okay," he said, "go back and tell them that I'll be there in an hour."

Gueren grinned.

"Thanks, Barry," he said. "Thanks a lot. We'll all be waiting for you."

He turned, climbed into his ship, and with a wave of his hand, wheeled his ship around and roared into the air. As the sound of his motor died away, Sika's booming voice said:

"Sika think you make mistake, Master. No like your friend. Sika feel you get in trouble if you go, Master."

Rand swung around and faced him.

"Are you afraid?" he demanded.

Instantly, Sika's head shook in the negative.

"No, Master," he said. "Sika go where you go."

"Good," Rand nodded. "Let's eat and shove off."

But Purcell and Jackson and Willis were not there when Barry Rand set the Red Falcon plane down on his old home tarmac. Gueren was grinning as he met them.

"Come on up," he invited. "I'll introduce you to the new skipper and he'll give you your special orders."

"Where's the rest of the gang?" Barry demanded.

"They've taken a bunch of replacements out to ready them for the big patrol in the morning," Gueren told him.

They were walking side by side toward headquarters while Sika trailed two paces behind them. They passed through the outer door of headquarters building, then

into the private office of the squadron commander. Barry took a dislike to him the minute he laid eyes on him. He was a gaunt little man with a pasty complexion and his beady eyes squinted out through thick spectacles. He smiled nervously as he eyed Rand and Sika and motioned them to chairs. Rand sat down at the end of the desk but Sika remained standing.

A crafty gleam appeared in the eyes of Captain Hawkins as he smiled, "You have come for your special orders? That's fine! I'll have them brought in at once."

He pressed a button at the edge of his desk and waited, his eyes trained on the door. There was a clatter of feet outside and the door burst open abruptly. Sika leaped back and crouched, ready to charge.

"Master, we're caught!" he cried. "We fight?"

It was Gueren who answered that with a derisive, cackling laugh.

"Sure," he taunted, "go ahead and fight. You'll be finished off a lot quicker. There's six guns trained on you. That means six shots at once, if you make a move."

THETHE Red Falcon turned his head slowly from the four guards who had suddenly rushed the place. He saw first the Colt automatic in Gueren's hand, pointed straight at his heart. Next, he saw a similar weapon being handled nervously by Captain Hawkins. His eyes flashed to Gueren.

"Knowing you as I have, Gueren," he said icily, "I should have been sure of something like this! I might have known that a louse like you could never change! You're the lowest, yellowest rat I've—"

"Silence!" Captain Hawkins cut in. "Gueren is a brave pilot. The other day he was shot down behind the German lines! Soon after that he escaped from

prison camp, stole an enemy plane, and flew back here."

Rand's half-narrowed eyes traveled from Captain Hawkins to Gueren's obviously displeased countenance. He smiled and nodded.

"I think," he said, "that I'm beginning to understand more than I did a moment ago." He turned to Gueren. "So that's what you were celebrating in Madame Cochet's place?" he snapped. "Well, come on, we're ready to go to the guard house. I suppose you've dated us up with a firing squad?"

"You won't be so cocky," Gueren snarled, "When you're up in front of eight loaded rifles. And there'll be plenty of men to guard you while you're in the guard house to see that you don't escape this time. They've got orders to shoot to kill if you make an attempt to get away."

"Master, you let me fight!" Sika's booming voice rang out. "I die for you so you escape."

A cold laugh left Barry Rand's lips.

"No, big boy," he said, "take it easy. There'll be no fighting. In fact, I wouldn't want to be free now for a million dollars—not if I had to leave this field."

For the first time, Rand got out of his chair. Guards snatched his side arms. He and Sika were marched down the tarmac with guards trailing behind.

In the guard house, Sika stared at Rand reproachfully and shook his head.

"Sika think you gone crazy," he said. "Why you not let me fight for you?"

Barry grinned.

"Wait and see," he said. "Things are going to break as soon as the old boys get back." He paused as though listening. Sika tensed.

"Planes coming now, Master," the black said.

"Right," the Red Falcon nodded.

He strode over to the barred window.

"That's a gang of Spads coming back now," he said.

He watched while the Spads landed and the pilots climbed out. Suddenly, he yelled from the window, "Hey, Willis! Jimmy Willis! Come here!"

Young Willis stared about.

"Here!" Rand called. "In the guard house!"

Willis' eyes shifted to the window of the guard house. The next minute he was running toward it. He stopped and glared. "Oh," he said, "it's you!" His face took on a look of shame. "I guess, Barry, maybe we owe you an apology for the dirty way we treated you. You couldn't have done the things that Gueren said he saw you do in Germany, when he was a prisoner over there, and still fight for us as you did when the Heinies had us trapped."

The Red Falcon grinned.

"Forget it, Jimmy," he said. He reached through the bars and slapped the lad's slim shoulder. "Listen," he said, "I've got to talk fast before the guards catch us. I've got everything figured out now. Gueren was shot down in Germany, wasn't he?"

Willis nodded.

"And the Heinies have gotten news beforehand of several drives that the Yanks planned, and they've utterly disrupted the whole thing—the first time with the bottle-neck trap and the second time with the mine. Right?"

Jimmy Willis nodded again.

"All this happened since Gueren got back from Germany, didn't it?"

"Holy gee, that's right!" Willis said suddenly. "And he was trying to throw the blame for all this on you, Barry."

"Right," the Red Falcon nodded. "Gueren has been going over in a new Spad to bomb Tanien, hasn't he?"

"Right," Willis nodded excitedly. "He said that while he was a prisoner over

there, he learned of a strategic point that he must bomb. It's supposed to be located in the village of Tanien. He's made two or three trips now, carrying a single bomb each time." Suddenly Willis tensed. "Hey, listen," he said, "I think orders have just come through. Look!"

The Red Falcon strained to see through the bars but he couldn't make it, for Willis was pointing down the field.

"That's the new Spad that Gueren has been flying on these trips," he said. "He's leaving right now. He's got those orders for tomorrow morning's operations and—"

Suddenly, the Red Falcon's arms shot between the grating and drew Jimmy Willis close to the window. With one hand, Barry jerked the Colt automatic from its holster at Willis' side.

"**I**'VE got to have this, Jimmy," he said quickly. "I've got to get out of here. I don't know the whole thing now. Gueren's escape sounded kind of funny, didn't it, as though it were too easy? Well, here's what happened. While he was a prisoner, the Germans made him a proposition. That guy would do anything for dough! I think there was money in it somewhere when he framed me. Anyway, they let him escape to come back here and keep them posted. I'll bet they're paying him plenty of dough for doing that spy job! He goes over on the pretext of bombing Tanien and he does—but he drops a message to the Huns there, too. Better beat it, Jimmy, or they'll think you helped me."

Jimmy Willis darted away with a breathless, "Good luck, Barry."

The engine of the new Spad roared out. The Red Falcon stayed at the window just long enough to see Gueren, in

the Spad, thunder into the air. He swung around and rushed to the grating in the door of the guard house. The guards were pacing back and forth in front of it. The Red Falcon bellowed out a command. "Look!" he barked.

The guards jerked around nervously, froze suddenly as they stared into the muzzle of that automatic in the hand of Barry Rand.

"There's ten bullets in this gun," Rand barked. "Unless one of you comes and unlocks this door at once, you're all going to die."

For an instant, no one moved. Then suddenly, a big fellow moved toward the locked door. He lifted a key from the keyboard at the side of the guards' room.

"You can't get away with this long," he growled. "Maybe you'll get out now but you'll be caught."

"All right," Rand snapped. "Listen. This goes for you and all the rest of you guards. I don't blame you fellows. You've got your job to do and Gueren's been kidding you. But Gueren is working for the Germans! He sold out to them when he was captured. He's just gone over to deliver the secret orders that just arrived. The quicker you open this door, the more Americans will be saved!"

The key rattled in the lock, the bolt slid back. Barry charged out, followed by Sika. They marched the guards before them, picking up side arms so that both Rand and Sika carried a gun in each hand. In that fashion they moved down toward headquarters. In a few words, Barry told his story to the cocky little captain.

"You have been fooled by Gueren," he told him. "I'm not charging you with being in with him, but if you want to hold up your standard as an American officer, you'll advise that the orders that were



just issued be changed immediately. The enemy will be planning counter attacks against the movements mentioned in the orders. Do you understand?"

The captain was shaking with fear.

"Y-yes," he nodded.

With the guards still ahead of them, they marched back to where the Red Falcon plane stood on the line. Jimmy Willis was there, and two other pilots, Purcell and Jackson.

Sika started the motor. Barry shook hands with all three of the pilots as the Liberty warmed.

"I don't think you'll be bothered with Gueren much longer," he said.

He swung up into his seat, opened the throttle, and sped in pursuit of Gueren. He came upon him just as he was returning from dropping the message.

The crimson crate of death was bearing down on Gueren. As he saw it, he turned in mortal fear back toward Germany. But the Red Falcon was on his tail.

"I kill him, Master?" Sika bellowed.

Rand shook his head.

"No," he said, "you keep your guns silent. I'm going to show you just how yellow he is."

Rand pressed his triggers and sent streams of tracers down on one side of the new Spad. Then he let streams of bullets

go pounding on the tail surfaces and ripping up the fuselage.

Gueren was turning, waving frantically, holding up his hands, pleading for his life, but Barry Rand bore on mercilessly. In his stark fear, Gueren was paying little attention to his flying. His only concern was to plead with Rand for his life. His ship was missing buildings and tree stumps by no more than fifty feet. Kicking and slashing at his controls, he raced on, with Barry sending his slugs close to him—but always purposely missing.

In his frantic fear, Gueren turned again, both hands off the controls. His face was ghastly white and pleading. A stone building loomed up before the plane.

At that instant, the Red Falcon ceased firing. Gueren whirled around to stare ahead, but he was too late! There was a terrific crash! Wings buckled, and the motor drove back into Gueren's stomach as he pitched forward. There was a flash of flame and the whole mass, as it crumpled there on the ground, burned furiously.

The Red Falcon brought his ship up out of its dive and headed toward the east, where Saar mountain loomed.

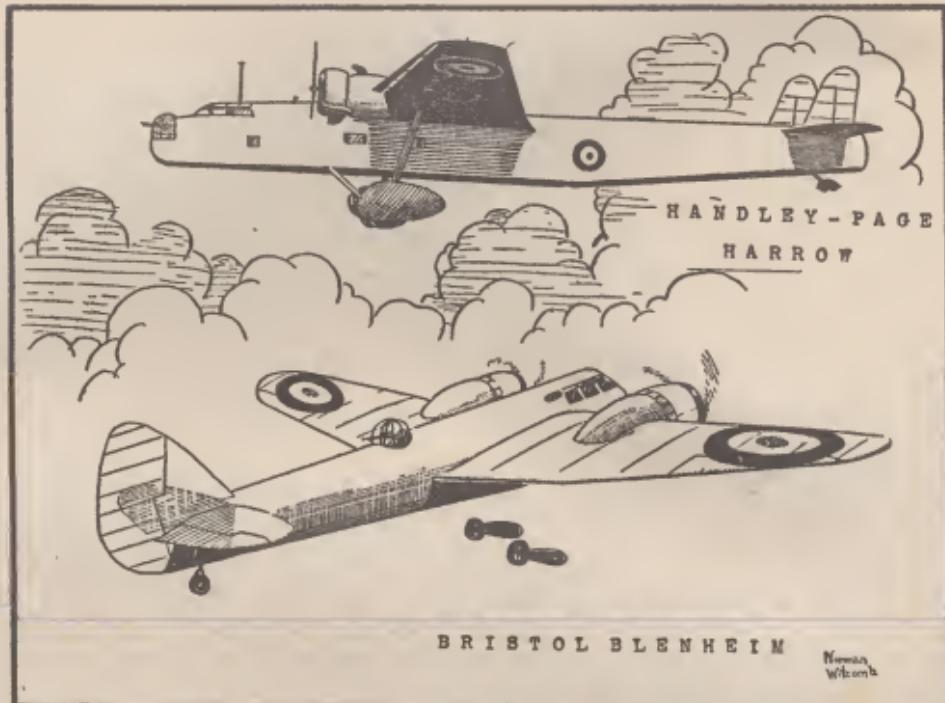
The Red Falcon had returned to his old outfit and had wreaked his just vengeance.

THE END



Today's Bombers

by Norman
Witcomb



PRESENT day war maneuvers, however harrowing and unpleasant to the peace-loving peoples of the world, have thrown a spotlight on the modern bombers, those lumbering birds of destruction which both soldier and civilian have grown to fear. But maybe the word "lumbering" can only be used in reference to the wartime bombers, for today these vast airships are as speedy and maneuverable as they are well armed.

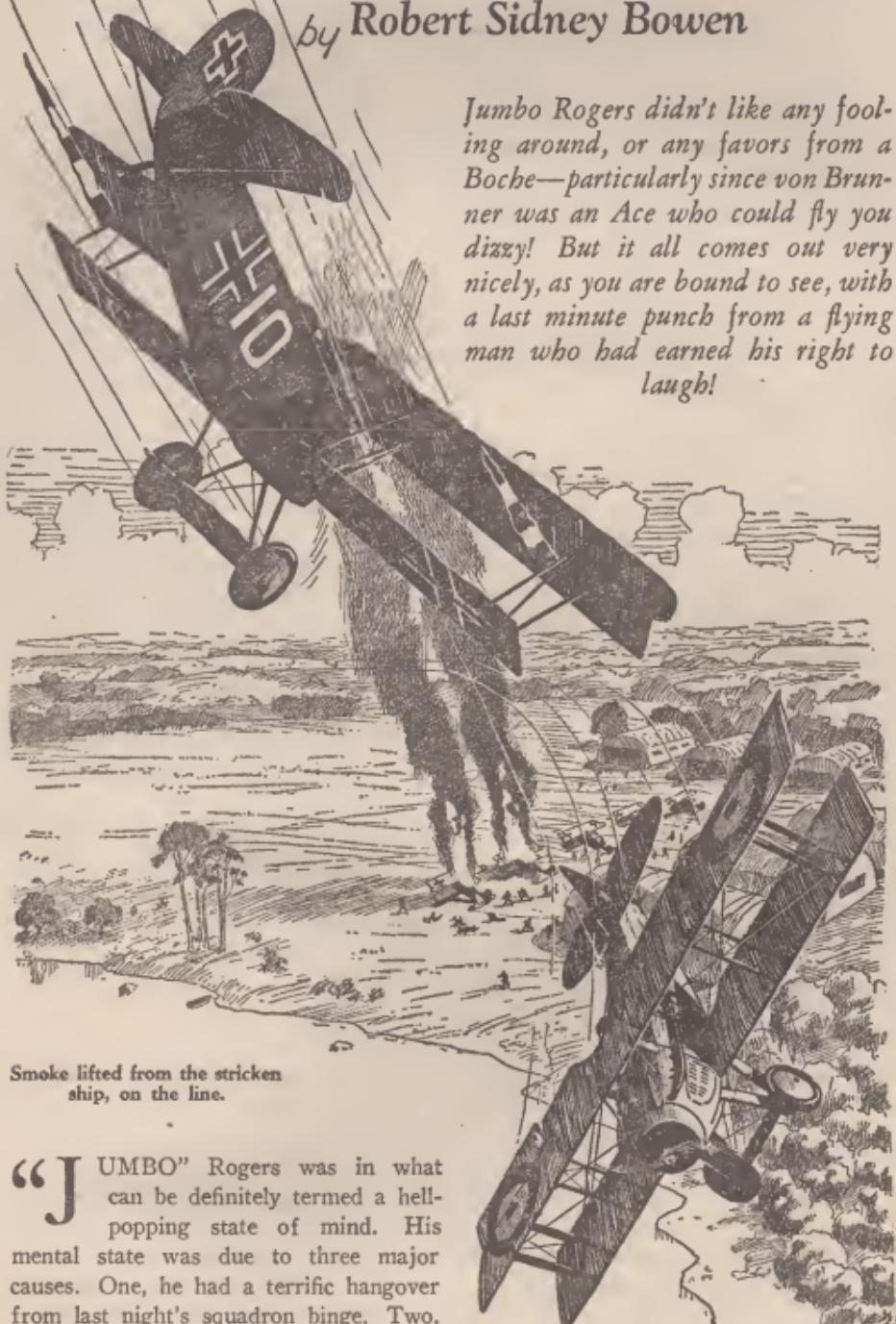
During the great war, the fighter had an enormous advantage over the bomber because of its superior speed and manuverability; and also, because of the fact that the bomber generally had but two gun positions, one fore and one aft. Today, however, the bomber is in some instances as fast, if not faster than the fighting plane. Besides, the modern bomber holds the advantage of having several gun positions which offer a steady gun platform for the defending gunner.

Shown above, are two of the latest type bombers. One, the Handley-Page Harrow, is a huge heavy bomber; probably one of the largest in the world. It is of metal construction, with tapered wings which have the Handley-Page slot, enabling easier and safer landings in spite of the plane's high speed. It is powered by two 960 h. p. Bristol Pegasususes. Dimensions and performance have not yet been released. The other is the Bristol Blenheim, the fastest medium bomber in the world. Its speed is derived from two 800 h. p. Bristol Mercuries, one of the finest aero engines in the world. These two planes are just a few of the many fine types now making their appearance, and several air experts contend that these craft and others like them, may soon drive the fighters out of existence. They visualize, instead, hundreds of big fighting bomber types; opposing each other with cannon and high calibre machine guns. These combats will resemble naval engagements of today, even to battle formations. Of course, this is only an opinion, for who can tell what the fighter designers will bring out next? Nevertheless, the fast, heavily armed bomber is here to stay, just so long as men are foolish enough to engage in wars.

Bullets for Nothing

by Robert Sidney Bowen

Jumbo Rogers didn't like any fooling around, or any favors from a Boche—particularly since von Brunner was an Ace who could fly you dizzy! But it all comes out very nicely, as you are bound to see, with a last minute punch from a flying man who had earned his right to laugh!



Smoke lifted from the stricken
ship, on the line.

"JUMBO" Rogers was in what can be definitely termed a hell-popping state of mind. His mental state was due to three major causes. One, he had a terrific hangover from last night's squadron binge. Two, he had just received a letter from a cutie

back home saying that she had up and married a Y. M. C. A. worker. And three, he hadn't had a good Fokker scrap in days. Of the three, the last irked him the most. You can get over hangovers, and you can find new cuties by the score. But, find a Fokker on that section of the Front—?

With a curse for emphasis, Jumbo downed a long cognac, grimly determined to cure his headache, or die in the attempt. The last drop was just going down his throat when his squadron pal, "Peewee" Hunt, came bounding in through the mess lounge door.

"Hey, Jumbo, guess what?"

The hefty pilot groaned.

"My God, you ask me to guess things on a morning like this! Go on, spill it before I plank you one with this glass!"

"Just heard it at the squadron office," the other said hurriedly. "We've got new neighbors at that old Hun drome over by the Contreau lake. Hold your hat, now! It's none other than von Brunner and his gang!"

Jumbo became interested enough to wrinkle his shaggy brows in momentary meditation.

"Von Brunner?" he mumbled. "Isn't he the guy that used to be up on the English Front, and the saps used to drink a toast to him for being a bloody fine sportsman, or some such fool thing?"

"Right!" Hunt nodded. "He's known as the one white man in the German Air Service. Always gives the other guy a break when he rates one. A regular guy, and—"

"Nuts!" Jumbo snarled. "The Hun doesn't live who'd give anybody a break! In front of us, huh? Well, that gives me an idea. Maybe I'd feel a heap better if I slapped down some big shot like him. And I won't need any breaks, either."

Heaving up, he pushed Peewee to one side and strode out to the tarmac. The

mechanics saw him coming, saw the look on his face, and knew just what to do. They had his prop turning over by the time he reached his ship. Legging in, he took a couple of minutes to test things, then waved the chocks away. In nothing flat he was off the ground and climbing up into the morning sky.

"A Hun give anybody a break?" he echoed to himself. "Huh, it's dopes like Peewee, believing such things, that keep this damn war going on so long. Maybe dropping this von Brunner will make his pals sore, and *then* we'll get somewhere!"

A muttered curse or two for emphasis, and he flattened out from his climb, swung east and headed in the general direction of the heretofore vacant German drome near the Contreau lake. Eventually he was out over No Man's Land, sliding through German archie bursts, figuratively thumbing his big nose at the gunners below. And in due time the Contreau lake, and its adjacent airdrome, came sliding up over the eastern horizon.

He didn't need more than one good look, when he got close, to realize that Peewee's news hadn't been false. At least, not the part about a new German *staffel* occupying the-drome. The tarmac was lined with Fokkers which sported white wings and jet black fuselages. And on each fuselage was a huge number painted in white.

Reaching up his free hand, Jumbo cocked his loading handles, then shoved the nose of his ship down in a terrific power dive. Thumbs resting lightly against the trigger trips, he glued his eye to the ring sight. And all the injustice of a hangover, of losing his girl, and of not having had any action recently welled up with him.

"Just paying my respects, you bums!" he roared. "Cut yourself a slice of these and then come over to my house sometime!"

Face twisted in a surly snarl, he jabbed both trigger trips home and sent twin bursts of hissing lead zipping down at the line of planes. Instantly, bedlam broke lose on the tarmac. Officers and mechanics fell all over each other in a frantic effort to dash clear of the crazy one-man attack. The sight wiped the snarl from Jumbo's lips, and stretched them back in a wide grin.

"Don't like it, do you?" he shouted. "Maybe I should have phoned you first! Well, this is just to let you know that Jumbo Rogers isn't giving, or taking, any breaks from you!"

Having reached the far end of the Fokker line, and having succeeded in setting two of them afire, he hauled up the nose and went rocketing heavenward. That is, he started to. Some three hundred feet of air had raced past his wings, when suddenly the yammer of Spandaus guns crackled against his ear drums. And simultaneously with the sound, unseen fingers poked a double row of holes across his top left wing.

IN A flash he cut over and down to the right, corkscrewed through a full roll, and then zoomed. Then, and then only, he took time to look up. Off to his right and coming at him hell-bent was an all black Fokker, with black and white streamers on the struts and a large figure "10" painted on the fuselage. It would have taken a pilot with less brains than Jumbo not to figure the answer.

"So it's you, huh?" he growled into the thunder of his engine. "The top guy—von Brunner himself! Out for a little look-see while your hired help gets the joint fixed up? Swell! Now I can make 'em mad!"

As the words rushed from his lips, he kicked his ship out from under the Fokker pilot's withering burst and started flying in earnest. At the end of five sec-

onds, however, he realized that he was not up against any ham, this time. Von Brunner "played" him with a skillful combat technique that made ninety per cent of his shots chew up nothing but air. But what made him mad was the seemingly friendly attitude the German had toward him. Half a dozen times, when Jumbo hurled his ship into a trick maneuver that left the Fokker flatfooted, von Brunner would fling up one hand and wave it in a gesture of congratulations.

Of course, von Brunner was doing his damndest to get Jumbo's plane into his sights. He was out for the kill just as much as the Yank, but it was his attempt to accomplish it with aerial finesse and sportsmanship that made Jumbo's hang-over-primed temper mount by leaps and bounds.

Finally, perhaps because von Brunner suddenly decided to show off a bit for the benefit of those below, he skidded badly when he should have made a whirwind split arc turn. With the speed of a striking eagle, Jumbo darted in and caught the Fokker square in his sights.

"Dance to these for awhile!" he belowed, and jammed both trigger trips forward.

And that is all that happened. The trips simply went forward—and the guns stayed silent. Snapping his eyes from the sight to the loading handles, Jumbo cursed bitterly. The position of the cocking handles told him that both guns were jammed hopelessly. That is, as far as clearing them in the air.

Then, suddenly, a flash of black wings out the corner of his eye jerked his head around. Less than twenty yards from him the black Fokker was flying wingtip formation. The helmeted head of the pilot was moving from side to side in a sympathetic gesture. A moment later von Brunner raised both hands over his head, clasped them like a boxer in the ring,

and shook them. Then he waved both in a shoo-shoo motion toward the American lines.

Fit to be tied, Jumbo let go for a moment and smashed his clenched fist against the loading handles in a spasm of blind rage. The result was that he jammed the guns all the more and skinned every knuckle on his fist. Eventually he relaxed, gaped downward and received the most crushing blow of all. Von Brunner was placidly gliding down to a landing on his own field without giving Jumbo a second look.

"You bum! You big tramp! Giving your mugs a great big laugh! Just you wait, egghead! We'll be meeting again, and I'll slap you down so hard you'll bounce."

With a savage lashing at the controls that virtually made the wings groan in protest, he whipped his ship around and went full-out back toward the American lines. By the time he reached them his anger had cooled considerably and sane reasoning had returned, to a certain degree. Slowly, almost unconsciously, his lips parted in a sheepish smile.

"A horse on you, Jumbo!" he muttered aloud. "You want to thank God the guy *did* give you a break—or you wouldn't be around, right now. But nuts, right over his own field, the big stiff. Thank God, too, none of the gang were along. I'll just keep my trap shut, and go hunting for him again. No damn Hun's going to give me a break, and get away with it!"

Eventually, when he slid down to his home drome and landed, Peewee Hunt was there to meet him at the tarmac line. The pint-sized pilot fixed him with a questioning gaze.

"Well?" Peewee demanded finally, when Jumbo simply legged out and lighted a cigarette.

"Well, what?" Jumbo grunted back.

"You left here with blood in your eye, guy," Hunt said. "And a dizzy idea about showing our new neighbor a thing or two. What happened?"

Jumbo spoke through a mouthful of smoke.

"Nothing," he said. "Just took a look-see around. Figured that the altitude would do my konk a bit of good. It did."

Peewee's eyes narrowed.

"Yeah?" he echoed. "And who put *those* there?"

As he spoke, Hunt pointed a stiff forefinger at the neat pattern of Spandau bullet holes in the hefty pilot's top wings. Jumbo looked at them and forced a look of blank amazement to his face.

"What the hell?" he gasped. "Now how the devil did they get there? I guess—".

The rest remained unspoken. At that instant the throbbing howl of an over-revving Mercedes echoed down from high up in the eastern sky. As one man, Jumbo and Peewee whirled around in their tracks, shaded their eyes against the sun's glare and stared upward. Peewee spotted it first.

"A Fokker!" he yelped. "And coming down like a bat out of hell! Sergeant! Get your men to the ground pits!"

The last was entirely unnecessary. The ground pit gunners were already racing across the drome to their weapons and every other mechanic was tearing out onto the tarmac to the ships. Right behind them, piling from the officers' mess, came the pilots. Rooted to the spot, Jumbo continued to squint upward at the diving plane. And then, suddenly, as a shaft of sunlight caught the black fuselage and brought out a huge white "10" in clear relief, he let out a howl and started to scramble back into the pit of his ship.

As his pants hit the seat he remembered his jammed guns. Cursing, he leaped out and dashed for the nearest

plane next to his. However, he took but a couple of steps, then ducked and whirled toward the protection of the hangar. Twin Spandaus were chattering now, and hissing bullets were kicking up little eddies of dust about the line of planes.

"Take cover!" Jumbo roared. "Take cover, or you may be hit!"

His order was also a waste of breath. Every mechanic and officer in the line of fire was breaking all Olympic records in their wild haste to get under cover. Panting and gasping within the safety of the hangar, Jumbo watched the streamer Fokker of von Brunner's cut down like a meteor gone crazy and rake the Yank plane line from one end to the other. Then the German zoomed up, *chandelled* over, and came tearing back down again.



THIS time, however, he did not fire his guns. Streaking down to the fifty foot level, he flattened out and flew straight down the tarmac. When he reached the middle, Jumbo saw a paper wrapped package arc out from the Fokker's cockpit. It dropped like a rock, hit not more than a dozen yards from where he stood, and went bouncing along for a few feet. When he glanced up at the Fokker again, the plane was thundering up in a terrific zoom toward the east, the ground pit gunners just throwing away perfectly good ammunition as they tried to pick the ship out of the air.

"Steady, you fool! That may be a bomb!"

The words came from Peewee's lips, and they were directed at a greaseball running toward the dropped package. The man either didn't hear, or else his curiosity was greater than his sense of caution. At any rate, he kept on running and scooped up the package. As he glanced at it he stiffened. Then he slowly

turned around, saw Jumbo, and came running over.

"Must be for you, sir," he said. "It's addressed to the pilot of plane Eight. That's the number of your ship."

With an effort to be nonchalant, when all the time his heart was hammering against his ribs, Jumbo took the package, hefted it a couple of times, then tore off the wrapping paper in a quick do-or-die motion. Inside was a plain wooden box, similar in size to an ordinary cigar box. There was a tiny catch on the lid. As the others crowded about, Jumbo undid the catch, lifted the lid and peered inside. The contents of the box were a note, and a shiny new set of armament officer's tools.

The world swimming slightly before him, Jumbo smoothed out the note and read the neatly penciled message. Each word sent more blood rushing up his neck to his cheeks.

My dear sir:

Your little visit was a most childish demonstration. We German airmen like to shoot our victims *out* of the air, not *off* the ground. However, perhaps that is the way you play the game, and so I am returning your visit in a like manner.

Incidentally, it is too bad our meeting had to end as it did. You were performing most admirably when you were forced to quit.

I hope that the enclosed present may be of some little service to you in case misfortune befalls you a second time. They are, I assure you, made of the finest German steel, and, with proper manipulation, will clear any gun stoppage, regardless of the type of gun.

Until our next meeting, which may be our last—

Cordially yours (?)
von Brunner

"I thought so—I thought so! And he made you look like a bum, huh? Well, maybe you'll believe me, *now*, that the guy is one up on you!"

Peewee's scornful words burned through Jumbo's eardrums, but he hardly

heard them. It was one thing to suffer the "humiliation" of having a German spare your life, when he could very easily have popped you off. But it was a horse of an entirely different color when the same guy gave you the rub-in laugh right in front of your own gang.

Crumpling the note in his big fist, Jumbo shoved it into his pocket. Slowly he turned and swept his eyes over the group gathered about him.

"No Hun is going to be one up on me!" he grated. "Not even a guy like von Brunner. I'm going to square this before the day's out—and alone! Any one of you guys try to tag along, and—Well, let it ride. It's my turn to be funny, now!"

No one gave him an argument. Not even Peewee. When Jumbo Rogers said, "Hands off"—it was hands off. He always settled things his way, and to the squadron's complete satisfaction. Perhaps that was one reason why he was the ace pilot of the outfit, and had been for months. At any rate, no one spoke, and in silence Jumbo took the armament officer's arm and lead him over to plane "8".

Two hours later, a grimly determined Jumbo took off from the drome and slanted up toward the eastern sky. In his eyes there was the look of a man who has suddenly undergone a strange awakening. And in his brain there was a spinning turmoil of conflicting thoughts. As he flew steadily eastward he started to bank the ship back half a dozen times, but checked the movement with a savage shake of his head.

"Like hell!" he would growl to himself. "The guy can't save my life, and get away with it, without me paying him back with interest. I'm going to even up, and afterward slap him down, *for keeps!* Dammit, there's still a war to be won!"

Such thoughts running through his

head and off the tip of his tongue, he crossed over No Man's Land, veered a shade to the north and headed for von Brunner's drome. In the pocket of his Sidcott suit was a note challenging the German to come aloft again and have it out. When the drome came into view he held the stick between his legs and started to stuff the note into a message-dropper pocket.

However, he just *started* to do that. As he happened to raise his eyes from the colored streamer in his lap, he suddenly saw the all-black Fokker curving up from the surface of the German field. Von Brunner had either expected his second visit, or else he was a crystal gazer. At any rate, the German ace was on his way up to start it all over again.

Ramming the note back into his pocket, Jumbo throttled slightly and held his altitude.

"We're starting even, von Brunner!" he grunted. "Not even going to dive on you. Come on up to my level."

Less than three minutes later, both planes were at the same altitude and hurtling toward each other, nose to nose. Hunched way forward over the stick, Jumbo grimly held his fire. His idea was not to send von Brunner down in flames this time. Nope! There was the life-sparing debt to be squared first. He was going to get the man cold, then let him slide down to safety. But next time—!

The yammer of Spandaus cut short the Yank's thoughts. Made-in-Germany bullets zipped toward him, bounced off his engine cowling and went whining off into thin air. Body braced, he held his ship prop-on for the Fokker. Like two meteors hurtling toward each other from opposite sides of the upper ether, the Fokker and the Yank Camel tore through the air.

In the last split second allowed, Jumbo faked a right split-arc, to make it look as though his nerve had broken. Then, quick

as a flash, he reversed the controls and whirled to the left. Von Brunner, starting to take advantage of Jumbo's break to the right, was unable to counteract his maneuver in time. Faster than light, Jumbo streaked up, over, and down on the German's tail. Throttling slightly, he hung there as though tied to the Fokker.

"Get the idea, von Brunner?" he roared into the thunder of his own engine. "It's my turn, now, to be big-hearted. Show me that you want to call it quits, and I'll let you go back home until some other time!"

THIE German, however, obviously figured that he was far from a beaten man. He started to twist and hurl his ship all over the sky in a desperate effort to shake Jumbo off. But he might just as well have tried to loop the moon. The Yank stayed with him every inch of the way, not once even slipping his thumbs up to the trigger trips. Eventually, though, it came time to show the German he meant business. A well-aimed burst past the German's whiskers would do the trick.

As von Brunner started down in a long dive, Jumbo steadied himself, ruddered his plane into perfect position and jabbed the trips. A split second later he tore his thumbs away with a howl of alarm. Von Brunner, trying one more trick, had cartwheeled to the right at that exact moment—cartwheeled right smack into Jumbo's short burst.

"You damn fool, I was trying to—" "

Jumbo choked on the rest. His burst had caught the Fokker's gas tank square on the bullseye. Already a tiny tongue of flame was licking up. But suddenly he saw von Brunner shove himself up out of the seat and reach down into the pit. Then the man hurled himself over the side. To Jumbo's utter amazement, the folds of a barrel type of parachute started streaming out from the under side of the fuselage. He'd heard that some German

planes had recently been fitted with the barrel type of balloon pilot's 'chute, fastened underneath the fuselage, but this was the first time he'd seen one.

Eyes popping, he watched von Brunner's falling body draw the shroud lines taut and pull the 'chute folds clear. Then without warning, as the blazing Fokker went careening off to the left, something seemed to go wrong. The German's canopied 'chute "buckled." One whole side of it folded in, and a tiny wisp of smoke from one of the shroud lines told Jumbo the answer. The shroud had caught fire from the plane, and though snuffed out by the rush of air, had let go under the strain put upon it by von Brunner's falling body. As a result, that side of the 'chute had flapped in under and fouled itself on the other shroud lines. And von Brunner was dropping faster and faster. Another five hundred feet and the 'chute silk would be ripped to ribbons.

Thought and action became one for Jumbo. He stuck his plane down in a mad power dive, then hauled it out close to the wind-swayed von Brunner. Face granite, teeth clenched, he started to circle the man, then tilted his plane over and sliced it in, wingtip on.

"Damned if I won't square it after all!" he grated, and held his breath.

One—two—perhaps three split seconds ticked by, and then the wingtip of the Camel plowed between the shroud lines and hooked up under the flapping silk. Inch by inch Jumbo brought his nose up until he had the silk caught securely on the wingtip and von Brunner was dangling in midair. Reaching out his free hand, Jumbo beckoned to the white-faced German, and slowly flat-turned around toward von Brunner's field.

"Pull yourself up, you dope!" he shouted. "This is a life saving act what is a life saving act!"

However, the German either lacked the

strength, or else the twisted shroud lines made it impossible. He tried several times, but after each effort simply slid back to the harness end of the shroud lines again. Jumbo cursed and shouted encouragement, but it was to no avail.

"Now, how the hell am I going to get you down without breaking every damn bone in your body?" Jumbo roared. "What a mess! Why in hell didn't you surrender when I—?"

He stopped short, and suddenly sat up straight in the seat.

"Perfect!" he cried. "Boy, is your gang going to get a laugh out of this! Talk about squaring up? Boy, oh boy!"

Keeping the wing up so that the snarled 'chute silk would not slide off, Jumbo cut his throttle and slowly coasted around and down toward the surface of the Contreuil lake. Foot by foot he lost altitude, until von Brunner's dangling feet were almost dragging in the water. Then he suddenly pulled the plane up to a gentle stall and tilted von Brunner's side of the plane downward. Gravity did the rest. The 'chute silk slid off the wingtip, and von Brunner dropped a dozen feet or more and hit the water with a huge splash.

Catching the stalled plane before it went slicing in after the German, Jumbo flattened out, rammed the throttle wide open, and then hauled the nose up. Glancing down, he saw von Brunner thrashing the water toward shore, the 'chute silk and shroud lines trailing after him. One look and Jumbo suddenly smashed his fist against the side of the cockpit.

"And does *that* give me an idea!" he shouted. "Send smart-alec presents, will you? Army stores should have the one I want!"

Without giving the swimming German a second look, Jumbo wheeled his plane about and went roaring back toward the Yank lines.

Late that afternoon, Baron von Brunner rushed out of his squadron office as he heard the howl of a diving American plane. When he reached the tarmac, the plane was less than a hundred feet above the field. A package floated out from the cockpit and came tumbling earthward. By the time it struck the ground, the plane, with the figure "8" on its fuselage, had wheeled and was racing back toward the setting sun.

A moment later a mechanic came panting up to von Brunner. He held out the package, and clicked his heels.

"For you, *Herr Baron*," he said.

The German took the package, ripped it open. Some cloth fell out, and a note. He picked up the note and stared at the writing.

Dear von Brunner:

We're all square, now. Next time it will be for keeps.

In case you hit the lake again, *this* little present may help you!

Hope you get the idea.

Pilot of Camel 8

Slowly von Brunner looked down at the cloth that had fallen to the ground. On impulse he picked it up, held it at arm's length between his two hands. It looked like two white salt bags fastened in the middle by a tubular piece of metal. The German frowned at them, then suddenly switched his gaze to the greaseball.

"What is this thing, Frantz?" he asked. "I don't recognize them, and I should like to appreciate the *Amerikaner's* sense of humor—for it must be humor, *ja*?"

The greaseball went all shades of the rainbow, chewed on his thick lower lip. Von Brunner's eyes crackled.

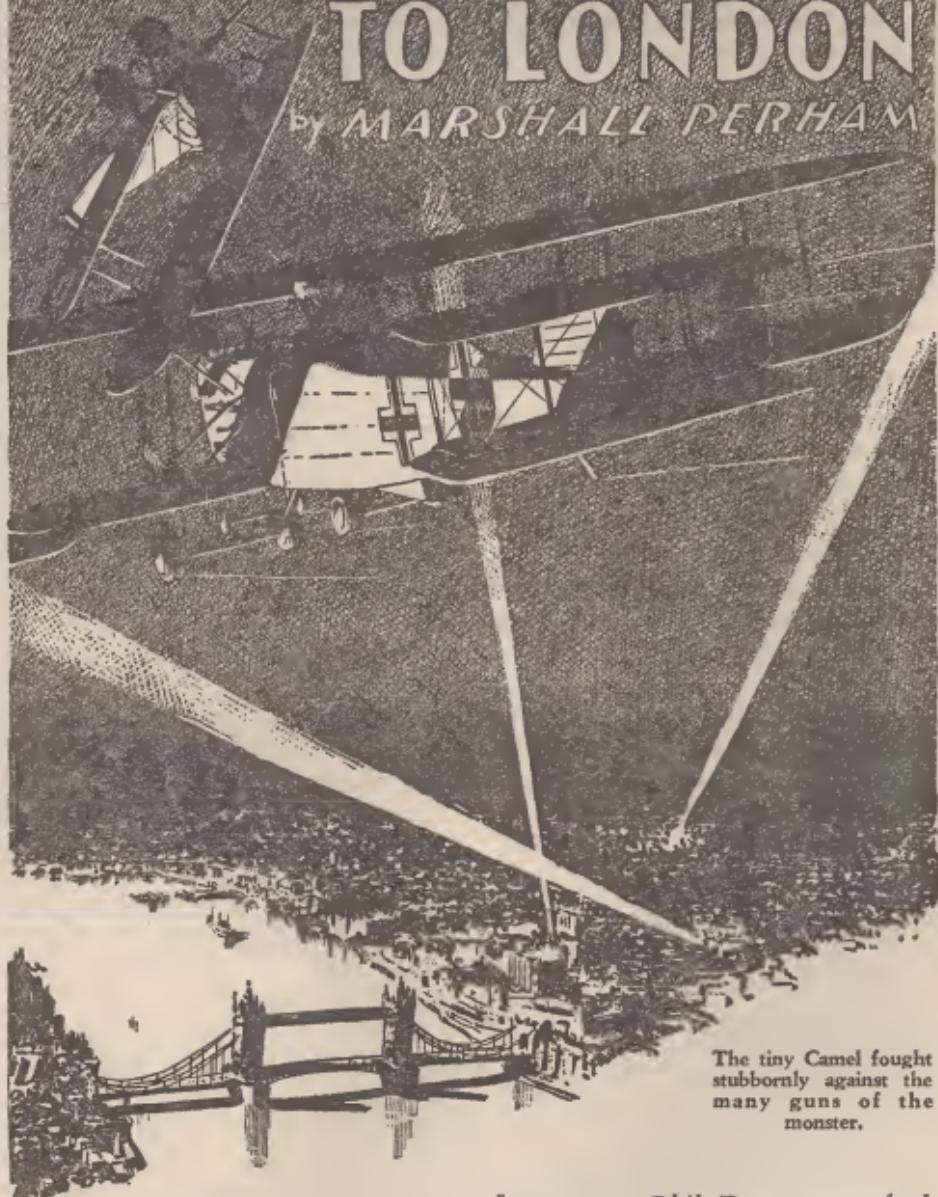
"Well? You have been in America! You know this thing, *ja*?"

The greaseball sucked in air.

"Ja, *Herr Baron*!" he stammered. "It is a pair of water wings. One uses them to help with swimming."

THE DEVIL COMES TO LONDON

by MARSHALL PERHAM



The tiny Camel fought stubbornly against the many guns of the monster.

LONDON! Phil Drury gazed across it from his Picadilly hotel toward the channel—toward France. Tomorrow he'd be crossing for his first glimpse of war, but tonight London was his, and he was set for a celebration.

His American uniform was immaculate.

It came to Phil Drury out of the night, this challenge on Wings of War, the Flight of the Dragon that shaped his Fate and dragged his soul through Hell!

His silver wings gleamed as if studded with diamonds.

"Pete," he called. "Make it snappy." From the bathtub came:

"O-o-o-o-h! There's a long, long trail a-winding,
Into the la-a-a-a-and of my dre-e-e-ams—"

"Pete, for—"

He stepped toward the door, but stopped abruptly as London went dark. A faint sighing that became a roar—a cry from the streets—

"The Dragons! The Dragons!"

Germany's new bombing monsters, more deadly than the Goths, better defensive fighters than the Zeppelins.

"Pete!" He groped through total darkness. "Pete, the Dragons are coming!"

Faint gurgles told him Lieutenant Pete Livingston had not stirred from his tub of suds and hot water.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah! Get out quick, let's see this."

"Aw, hell. You'll get enough war, pretty soon! And this tub of hot water may be my last for—"

"Listen Pete, come on quick, they—"

"Nuts, my boy, nuts! In this dark, I'd be apt to dry myself with my pants and wear my towel. Besides, this hot water is—o-o-h!"

The sigh of pleasure was accompanied by luxurious wallowing.

With a snort of disgust, Drury dashed outside, where he could see the British meet the Dragon attack. A deserted taxi was at the curb. He jumped in, and away he went for the British flying field down on the Thames.

He hadn't gone a hundred yards before all hell broke loose. The first bomb landed right behind him. Another struck a building, and debris rained in torrents.

He sped on unhit, somehow, until he reached the field. He scurried to a hangar

as a Dragon flashed overhead, and peered forth when it was gone.

A strong arm hurled him back.

"Crazy Yank! Want yer bloomin' 'ead blown off?"

"What the devil are you doing?" Drury demanded.

"We's lyin' low, we is."

"Aren't you sending—

Wham! Wham!

"—sending any ships up?"

"We ain't! We ain't got planes to waste. Them Dragons is bleedin' flyin' demons."

A bomb sprawled Drury. He came up unhurt, but fighting mad. In the hangar was a Camel. Before he realized the consequences of his act, he had made contact, spun the prop, and the motor had taken hold.

"'Ere! Wot yer doin'? Gawd lumme, wot yer doin'?"

"I'm going up."

"No yer ain't! Crazy Yank, yer—"

A Yank fist cracked him on the jaw, and the Camel bellowed into the night with a mad Yank at the controls. Only when he was up did he realize what he had done. Hitting a British soldier, stealing a British plane—that was enough for court martial. First he started back, but that would do no good! The damage was done! When he returned, it had better be with a Dragon scalp!

So, over black London he soared, looking for trouble. Quick as a flash, it came. A Dragon loomed in his sights and guns roared. Fiery lances sped through the night at him—at the vitals of his plane.

Down he rolled, with the fire following until the rear swivel gun that had launched it could no longer get range over the cowling, and then the big Dragon was silent save for the droning of the motor as it headed for the channel. Drury zoomed, guns seeking that dark silhouette against the night sky. The Dragon was

speeding almost at the rate of his pursuit ship—fast, these big ships—roaring through wisps of London fog, gigantic crossed wings and fuselage suddenly outlined against patches of stars. Drury's mountings bucked. Twin fire streams curved high, crept along the Dragon fuselage toward the motor—toward the pilot—

But suddenly, through the bomber floor, came answering fire. Right at him—and instinct alone enabled Drury to duck in time.

Protected above and below. He began to see why these things had terrorized London. There was no defense against them. Still, there must be a vulnerable spot somewhere.

HE WHEELED through fog and night to plunge head-on at the monster. Red trails in the black, leaping at the Dragon—and red trails leaping back, three of them, two from stationary forward mountings, and one from a single swivel gun in the forward bombing pit.

Drury plunged just in time. God! Protected above and below, front and rear. The evil reputation of these things had been understated! How was he going to smack it down unless

Brrrrrt!

Wildly he glanced around. The Dragon had dived after him, banking and speeding with his own ship, and those three forward mountings were spraying!

Was there anything these crates couldn't do?

Into a frantic Immelmann he roared, the Dragon following inch by inch. By sheer luck, he discovered the one weakness of these huge ships. They could defend themselves from every angle, they had the speed and most of the maneuverability of a fighter, but they couldn't roll.

And Drury, rolling desperately at the top of his turn, was able to shake pursuit.

The maneuver gave him altitude. And realizing now that his only chance lay in shooting it out with the gunners, he utilized it for additional speed as he roared down to attack. Five hundred feet above the huge crate, he opened fire. He couldn't

see the end of his bullet trails, but he could see an uncomfortable lot of return fire. Then his stick was back, and he shot over the Dragon so close that the gunners must have ducked.

Instantly he was speeding back. This time, there was only one defensive volley from the Dragon; the rear pit was silent.

He had potted the gunner!

"Luck! Boy, what a break! Should have potted me with that movable gun!"

The pilot was now trying desperately to escape. But the forward mountings of the Camel went into action. Glowing streams swept along the controls, down the fuselage, tore out an aileron—then there was a burst of flame. The Dragon charged upward five hundred feet, rearing like a mortally wounded beast. Then down—down—spinning and wailing toward destruction in the Channel.

Drury blew a kiss over the cowl.

But his triumph died when he again began to wonder what they would do to him. Even that Dragon scalp was not apt to save him. He'd catch it sure.

But Drury, who had seen only one attack by the Dragons, failed to realize how utterly terrorized London was by them, and how willing they would be to accept as a deliverer anyone who could down one. As soon as he was down, he was swarmed by a madly cheering mob.

"Good effort, sir!"

"'E's a bloomin' flyin' demon, that's what 'e is!"



Drury was pounded on the back, and his hand was pumped until it felt ready to fall off. But right in the midst of the impromptu celebration, an officer with yards of braid and an escort marched up and gave him that noncommittal English eye which might mean anything. Drury's heart sank. Officers might have different opinions about his escapade.

"By Jove, Yank," the officer said. "A sporty bit of flying." Drury heaved with relief. "We've lost twenty ships to those beggars, and this is the first we've downed. Come, the Staff wants to see you."

In the rear of a chauffeur-driven limousine, the officer introduced himself as Colonel Charles, aide to General Middleton of the R.F.C., and beyond that, conversation was impossible. For London had turned out to howl its tribute to this hero who had shot down a Dragon single-handed. When they learned that he had a good old English name like Drury, even if he was a Yank, they howled louder still.

It took an hour to reach R.F.C. headquarters, where he was presented to General Middleton and the hastily assembled staff.

"There is no time for formalities, Drury," the grey-haired, square-jawed general said tensely. "Tell us, and tell us quickly—how did you do it?"

"I—I don't know," Drury replied slowly. "The bomber was as fast as I, but finally I landed a lucky shot, and—"

He stopped, evident disappointment clouded the faces of the staff.

"We had hoped," the general said slowly, "That you had discovered a vulnerable spot."

"I'm afraid not, sir. Those things are completely protected, front and rear, as far as I know. The only thing I learned is that they can't roll."

"And we know that already," the general sighed. Suddenly he was on his feet.

"But we have to stop them! There *must* be a vulnerable spot, and we have to find it."

"I'm afraid I can't help you, sir."

The general sat down slowly. His eyes were thoughtful.

"Maybe, Drury, you can. Maybe you can."

"How, sir?"

There was silence in which the crowd outside sounded like thunder.

"You hear those cheers? They're for you—you're a hero, Drury! You're going to continue to be one. We're going to give you the D.S.O."

"Why—"

"We're going to let word leak out that you've discovered a vulnerable point in the Dragons. That may dispel Germany's confidence in them until we get ready for our next move, which is—"

"Yes," Drury said tensely.

The general laid a hand on his arm.

"You've shown the stuff heroes are made of, Yank. Do you have enough of it to risk making yourself a fool—a failure—perhaps even die—for your country and mine?"

The very air seemed electric. Even the crowd outside was unheard.

"Yes," Drury replied simply.

"You haven't even asked what I want you to do."

"I don't care, sir."

"And that," said the general, "proves you're the man. Now here's the plan. We have the American 87th in France, detailed to capture one of these Dragons so we can find their vulnerable spot—if they have one. You're going to command that squadron, Drury!"

Drury started. Command of the 87th! A hard-boiled bunch of Yanks who had cockily chosen as their emblem Uncle Sam's foot planting a kick on the seat of a pair of German infantry pants! A tough, merciless, fighting bunch.

"Why sir, I can't—couldn't—"

"I see. You're afraid you're not big enough."

Drury flushed. "No sir. But there are better qualified men, and—"

The general leaned forward. "If you really knew the vulnerable spot in the Dragon, there would be no better man in the Allied forces. And that's what we want the Germans to think your qualification is! We're just decoying them with you. You're liable to be a terrible failure—a laughing stock. You're even increasing the risk every flier runs of dying—for your country. Do you want the job?"

"Yes," said Drury. And then he added, "On the condition I can take my buddy with me."

And so it was that Lieutenant Pete Livingston and Major Phil Drury, D.S.O., went to the 87th.

“WELL,” said Drury as they relaxed in Operations after ceremonies were over. "Here we are—on a velvet cushion that may get red hot any minute."

"This job of capturing a Dragon is a dead man's job—if he's not dead now, he will be soon," Livingston said.

"That," declared Drury, "is what we're here for."

"But that's only half. Did you see the faces of the sky-killers you're commanding? They resent your being appointed over them. You, practically a greenhorn, when they're veterans of some of the toughest air campaigns. They consider you a kiwi, and they'll be out to prove you one; to run you out of the squadron."

"I know," Drury muttered gravely.

"Well, what're you going to do?"

"Fight!" Drury shouted. "Fight these sky-devils as I'm going to fight the Dragons—from the first ditch to the last! They're tough! All right, so am I! And I've got an iron glove on my fist—authority."

Almost at once, he got a chance to use that iron glove. Lieutenant Gregg came swaggering into Operations.

"I wanted to see about getting you an orderly—*sir*," he drawled.

Drury sensed a sneering undercurrent. "I don't need one."

"Then how are you going to keep your boots so shiny?"

Drury's eyes flashed to Gregg's boots, smudged with oil and grease. He wondered what it meant.

"I'll take care of my own equipment, Gregg."

Gregg saluted with absurd formality.

"And see that you do the same," Drury said quietly.

The sneer on Gregg's face became obvious.

"I mean it! Shine up, then come back and show me."

Gregg withdrew, still sneering. In a few minutes, Captain Hale, second in command, burst in.

"Sir—I should have warned you, but—well, sir, you see, oily boots are a squadron tradition! They symbolize hours of fighting and flying, and go with our 'kick' insignia! You'll have the whole squadron down on you if you make Gregg shine up. It would be a worse disgrace than taking his Wings away."

Drury looked at the captain's boots, which were even dirtier than Gregg's and bore two bullet creases, which he wore proudly.

"He shines up, or I'll break him!"

"But sir, don't you see—"

"I see! I see that since I'm newly in command and at the Front, Gregg came here to bait me—to see what he could get away with. Well, he can't get away with anything! I'd have let my boots get greasy if I'd been told decently it was a squadron tradition. But I won't now! And every last man will shine up. Give that command."

Hale started to protest, but he saluted and withdrew.

"And now," Drury muttered. "I've done it."

He waited, expecting trouble, but every last man shined his boots and came to exhibit them—and exhibit contempt. Drury knew he had started out wrong, but he also knew that if he yielded an inch, this hard boiled bunch of sky-devils would ride him clear out of France.

But he had little time to think of that; he was marked for activity. Colonel Jamison, his commanding officer, came and made him memorize the name, number, and whereabouts of every spy attempting to get information about the Dragons.

"This is never written, Drury," he explained. "And you must never breathe of it to anyone. Understand? Anyone?"

"You don't think an enemy spy might—"

"Yes, this sector is believed to be full of enemy agents. Anybody might be one. Incredible, isn't it? That's why we've lost so many of the agents we've taken across the lines. Germany knows they're coming almost before we send them. Which reminds me, we're going to send over another—a flier whose duty it will be to try to capture a Dragon. I want you to select a man from this outfit to take him across."

Drury went cold. Ever since he had known he would take command, he had dreaded that most terrible duty of all C.O.'s—ordering a man out to die. This was the first time he would have to do it. Balloon busting, artillery strafing, dog fighting, bombing raids—all were child's play compared to spy dropping.

"He must be someone you can trust absolutely."

Drury felt now as if an icicle were forming around his heart. He had just been told that anyone might be an enemy spy. There was only one man he knew positively was not—Livingston. To send

him, an inexperienced pilot, was worse than to appoint a fledgling to command a squadron.

"I'll go myself," he chattered. "No one else—"

"Ridiculous! How about that friend who came with you?"

"Yes," Drury murmured, "my friend."

The colonel departed, leaving on his shoulders the burden of delivering that hellish command. He went to Livingston—and Livingston smiled and nodded.

Drury fled from that smile. And then he knew the other living hell of C.O.'s, the hell of waiting—waiting for the departure of the man you have sent to die. Doing nothing, trying to think of nothing; just waiting, waiting, waiting until he wanted to scream "Go, go—for God's sake, go! Get it over with! Die if you have to—but get it over with!"

In the dead of night, Livingston and his charge did go. From Operations he watched them. And then another type of waiting began, waiting for Livingston to *come back*. A pile of smoked cigarettes began to grow. The butts were short at first, and then they became longer and longer, until some were almost unsmoked. The pacing footsteps became faster and faster, and the door of Operations opened more and more frequently.

But Livingston did not return.

Dawn at the Front—dawn breaking across shell-plowed fields, dimming the bloody glare of artillery, and revealing a man in major's uniform, hair towed, eyes hard and wide and glaring. Standing on a tarmac—waiting for a plane that never returned. A plane carrying a man who had laughed at death, who had possessed the calmness to remain in the luxurious comfort of his hot bath while Dragons were raining death and hell on London! Drury's friend.

He might have stood on that tarmac

forever had not Captain Hale led him to his quarters.

It was while he was sitting there on his cot that a sudden roar overhead jerked him out of his lethargy. Then came a cry: "Dragon!"

Drury dashed outside.

"All fliers in the bomb proof! Man the ground guns! Get all planes in the hangars!"

But the Dragon did not drop bombs. It wheeled into the wind—and landed.

A LONE man half climbed, half fell from the cockpit. Drury was first to reach him. It was the spy Livingston had flown across. His left arm was shattered by a bullet, and a wound was gaping hideously in his right side.

"Major—Drury—" he gasped.

He thrust a paper into the C.O.'s hand and collapsed. One look sufficed to tell that this Yank spy had not only brought home a Dragon, but a blueprint construction sketch! They had what they wanted!

"Ambulance!" Drury bawled.

The wounded man was trying to speak. "Livingston—"

"Dead?" Drury quavered.

The man shook his head.

"Captured?" Drury asked.

The fellow managed to nod.

Worse than death! Captured to face a squad of rifles, some chill dawn. Drury whirled to order every plane out to save him, but the words never left his lips. In his possession were two objects more valuable to the Allies than an entire division. He had to attend to them before any personal matters.

The order he issued was, "Get this Dragon to shelter!"

But it came too late. Out of the sky roared winged legions of the Hun, pursuit ships with white hot guns, followed by

great Dragons, sagging with their bombs. Charging to destroy the captured ship that would betray their secrets of construction to the Allies.

Wham!

A charge opened a gaping hole in the tarmac. Overhead flashed a Dragon, machine guns ranting, pouring bombs at the rate of five per second. Through that storm of death and destruction Drury dashed, bellowing orders.

"Every pilot to his ship! Take off and protect this Dragon!"

Men sprang to obey. Amid a hail of bullets and bombs, two Spads flashed from a hangar. Four Fokkers leaped them. One went into the tarmac nose first, and the other ground looped.

Then the brimstone of hell rained upon the captured Dragon. A great bomb brought down the hangar sheltering it, and upon the wreckage fell incendiary material.

"Fire apparatus!"

But planes wheeled above the fire truck, and light bombs reduced it to wreckage. Then flames leaped skyward as the gas tank of the captured Dragon ignited.

"No more planes in the air!" Drury roared.

The Boche, thinking their work done, were going home. But Drury still had that blueprint.

Suddenly Gregg confronted him. Before he knew what was coming, the flier smashed him in the face. Stunned, he toppled, vaguely aware that the precious blueprint was snatched from his hand.

He reeled to his feet just in time to see Gregg, clutching the drawing, leap into a Spad that had been prepared to go up and meet the enemy. Drury tottered forward, but the motor roared and Gregg was gone.

It was all clear now, why Gregg had



been the one to bait him—Gregg was an enemy agent!

Drury leaped into another plane. Gregg had only a short lead, and both ships were warmed up.

It was touch and go, as Gregg swept into the air and Drury rose right behind him.

Five hundred yards—four—three—two—one! He closed up the distance with agonizing slowness as they flashed over Allied territory across the lines, deep into Germany—into danger. But he didn't think of that. He was going to bring back that blueprint or know the reason why.

At seventy-five yards, twin Vickers went into action. Gregg dived for greater speed, and Drury dived with him. His guns rolled again. Gregg wheeled to fight back.

Drury slammed at him so hard that every strut groaned. His guns scythed a great curve across the heavens as they lunged wickedly for each other's tails, but the veteran Gregg was wily, and half rolled and dived out of range.

He came back, and thundering boards leaped about Drury's feet. He wheeled a nose-high slip that sent him skidding past his adversary, at cost of altitude, to rake the red, white, and blue tail fabric into space.

"You don't deserve those colors, anyway," he gritted.

Then he was rushing back from below, motor pounding—guns pounding with it. Gregg had made the mistake of trying to loop to Drury's tail. He had underestimated the quick precision with which this Yank youngster could handle his ship. Drury caught him going over backwards, wound him up in his own maneuver, stayed with him, slashing viciously.

An aileron dangled into space and then dropped off. The tail took another beating. But he dared not shoot him down;

not in Germany. That blueprint was in Gregg's possession. He had to drive him home.

Gregg came out of his loop thoroughly pounded. Drury was right behind, where he could have finished the traitor with a single burst of his guns. But instead, he had to get in front of him.

The stick came back and the throttle went to full as he soared into an Immelmann. Back he came with a steady tracer stream in front of the traitor Spad to make Gregg turn. Now! He had him!

Brrrrrrrat!

A volley jerked his head around. Three Fokkers on his tail!

When one Spad attacks another, a huge intelligence is not required for German fliers to know their own comrade is in one of them.

Death flashed past the young C.O.'s head on Spandau wings. He would have gone down before superior numbers had not Gregg forced himself into the unequal combat. Drury, helplessly hemmed in, could not escape. Gregg's Vickers chanted. His aim was perfect. Drury's propeller exploded right in his face.

So he was to be taken prisoner! He had chased Gregg right up to the Dragon lair, and now they were herding him down on the tarmac before their threatening guns, Spandau and Vickers united.

The minute he touched, Germans dragged him out. Gregg hurried up.

“WELL, Mr. Well-Dressed Soldier, would I be rude if I said you booted one?" The contemptuous smile flicked across his face and vanished in a scowl. "Who are the Allied agents around here?"

"I don't know."

"I'll find a way to make you know. Do you want to talk, or—"

"If I talk, Gregg, I'll be impolite enough to tell you what I think of you."

The spy's face hardened. "All right, you asked for it!"

Drury was herded to headquarters. German officers gathered about and Gregg began to question him.

"You'd better come across."

"Wouldn't you like me to?"

"You will," Gregg informed him. "Or you'll never see another sunrise."

Drury faced him defiantly. Gregg slugged him across the mouth.

"Do you want to talk, or do you want more of that?"

"It'll take more than that."

Gregg turned to the guard and snarled an order. Half of the officers withdrew, and the others bound Drury in a chair.

"Now," Gregg said, "we'll see!"

Presently the soldiers came back—with Livingston.

"Pete—"

He was cut short by a heavy blow from Gregg.

"Shut up until I tell you to talk!"

Livingston was stripped to the waist and bound in a chair. Gregg picked up a saw-toothed bayonet, and began rubbing the teeth slowly over Pete's arm.

"Do you want to talk, or—"

"You louse!" Drury shrieked.

"See him in hell before you talk," Livingston gritted.

Gregg began to press on the bayonet as he sawed back and forth. Blood oozed from Pete's arm. His jaws set. His eyes closed. Every muscle became rigid.

"Stop!" Drury shrieked. "Stop, you damned fiend!"

"Do you want to talk?"

"He'll never talk!" Livingston shouted.

The sawing became harder. An artery spurted. A tourniquet was applied quickly. Pete would be no good if he bled to death.

His bare torso became silvery with sweat. But no sound escaped his lips. Drury flung himself against his bonds,

and was slugged dizzy. When his head cleared, the saw had penetrated deep. Pete couldn't keep the sounds of pain from his lips.

Then the saw hit the bone, and he screamed.

Drury screamed too. "Stop! Stop, for God's sake! I'll talk!"

"Don't do it, Phil! Don't—" Pete's voice trailed off. He had fainted.

His courage made Drury's own courage come back.

"No, I'll be damned if I'll tell you anything!"

"The hell you won't! I've got other ways."

Gregg gave a sharp order. Drury was untied, the end of a rope was bound tightly about his neck, the middle looped around his wrists near the small of his back, the bight passed between his legs, and the other end was also tied around his neck. The rigid truss, which causes a person to strangle himself if he tries to get free.

Livingston was bound the same way, and they were hustled to a Dragon.

"We have facilities for dropping large bombs from the forward pit," Gregg drawled. "One even the size and shape of a man!"

Drury's blood turned to ice.

"Do you want to talk?"

"No! Do it and be damned!"

Soldiers put Livingston on the bomb rack. Then Drury was put on above him, face up, a screen of heavy metal separating him from his unconscious comrade.

"You'll talk."

Drury hurled himself against his bonds. "Like hell I will!"

"Don't move," Gregg cautioned. "Or you'll choke yourself."

He climbed in the control pit. The single motor roared—roared right over Drury's feet. The propeller tip was not over four feet away. The plane swooped

up with lulling smoothness—smooth as the blade of a dagger.

Desperately he attacked the bonds. He pulled and fought, but each movement drew the knots around his neck tighter, and he finally had to stop for air just when he seemed to be winning. He sank back, almost unconscious.

The motor throttled down.

"Would you prefer to splash over the landscape of France or Germany?" Gregg called.

Drury choked down a scream of defiance.

"I'll take you to France. It'll give you a chance to think it over—and maybe change your mind."

The motor sped up. Panting, face wet with sweat and tears of sheer desperation, he tried to stretch one foot far enough to reach the whirling prop blade and shatter it. But he couldn't make it, and he cursed it for being too far away; cursed because he couldn't get his foot chewed to a pulp!

But what would have been the difference? Gregg could have dumped his human bombs before he came down, or kept them prisoner for some more fiendish torture after they landed.

His head rolled in agony. As a condemned man before the firing squad must watch fingers tighten on the triggers that will send him into eternity, so his eyes were drawn to the jointed release bar that would open the bomb shutters when Gregg pulled on it. It was just beyond his feet. In hellish fascination, he watched, expecting every second to see it move, break the shutters, and send Livingston to—

He kicked at the release bar spitefully, as if it were a living thing he loathed with the hatred of the Furies. But it, too, was out of reach.

Then cooler, he tried to stretch one foot forth, braving the torturous strangling of the rope at his neck, seeking to force his

boot between the release bar and the longerons, to jam the mechanism and make opening the shutters impossible. Sweat rolled. Grunts of strangulation came from his tortured throat. Almost unconscious, he sank back. He couldn't make it. Like the prop, the bar was too far away.

Then once more the prop slowed down.

"We're going over the 87th," Gregg called. "Talk now, or else—"

"Go to hell!"

The motor sped up. This was the end. Why should he go through this agony? Why not tighten on the rope and end it? But then Livingston . . .

No, he couldn't take the easy way when it meant Pete's life.

HE ROLLED his head until through the bomb shutters he could see familiar landmarks. It was a matter of seconds now. In his last throes, he kicked and thrashed wildly. He gouged one toe into the heel of his boot, pushed in his convulsions, and the boot, softened by much polish, came partially off.

"God!" he breathed.

He attacked that boot frantically with the other, pushing at it, tugging, literally tearing it off an inch at a time until his foot was far up in the leg.

The motor throttled down.

"Well?" Gregg demanded with finality.

"Go to hell!" And there was new defiance in Drury's voice.

The motor roared as Gregg dived to drop his ghastly bombs directly on the field—a warning to other Allied airmen. Rubbing, tugging, Drury shoved that boot almost off, so it barely hung on his foot. The bomb shutters were quivering now from pressure of Gregg's hand on the release. In another second—

But before that second could elapse, Drury utilized the extra reach given by the partially removed boot to push it into the aperture between the longerons and

the bomb release. A bare moment later, the release tightened as Gregg tried to drop his ghastly bombs. But the shutters refused to open. He could see the release bar gouge deeply into his boot as Gregg tugged with all his might. But the boot had jammed it!

Gregg realized that somehow Drury had thwarted him. The throttle came down, and Gregg's voice was insane with fury.

"You're not so damned smart! Do you want to talk or—"

"You can't make me!" Drury shrieked triumphantly. And meanwhile he was gouging at the other boot frantically with his stockinginged toe.

"I'll blow your head off!" Gregg screamed. "You'd better talk!"

Drury's reply was derisive laughter. Maddened by it, Gregg pulled forth his automatic and fired point blank through the thin wall that separated them. The bullet nicked Drury's hand as it ricochetted off the bomb shutters, but Gregg couldn't see from where he was whether he had hit his victim or not.

"Missed!" Drury howled with a delight he didn't feel as he stalled for time and gouged at the boot.

Maddened, Gregg fired three times in rapid succession. One bullet went within an inch of his head. The second struck him full in the chest, plowed upward across the surface of his ribs and across his shoulder, searing with a hot pain that kept him from ever knowing where the third went.

"Rotten!" he screamed through lips that writhed with pain. "You shoot like all the rest of the lousy Huns!"

Again the automatic roared. Over it, he heard a groan from the half conscious Livingston. But he laughed in defiance. For he could see through bomb shutters that they were close to the ground, and the tarmac of the 87th was dotted with

men who craned upward to see what this strange gun battle could be all about.

"You pampered lap dog!" Gregg shouted. "I'll show you! I'll take you back to Germany and take your hide off your back, inch by inch. I'll—"

In his fury, he leaned up in the cockpit, and hurled the gun over the cowl at Drury. The Yank laughed. It was real laughter this time.

Gregg gave the Dragon the gun. It was what Drury had been waiting for—waiting for the prop blades to get going full blast.

For he had the other boot worked almost off. And as the prop became merely a gleaming disk, he pulled back his leg and let that boot fly right into it.

There was a rending crash as the blades, traveling at a terrific rate, demolished both the boot and themselves. Splinters showered down and the huge ship lurched into a spin. Gregg switched off the motor desperately, and barely managed to right the powerless crate as it banged heavily onto the tarmac of the 87th.

Drury had brought a Dragon home!

Gregg vaulted out. He was going to run for it.

"Stop him!" Drury yelled.

As if in reply, there was a hoarse command to halt. A pause—the command repeated! Another pause—the rattle of fire—a horrible scream—and silence.

Drury tried to sit up. Half strangled, bleeding, wracked by the ordeal he had been through, the effort was too much. Unconsciousness came over him in a great black flood.

He was next aware of being sick all over. His head felt full of electric needles. For a long time, he thought opening his eyes was not worth the effort. Then he opened them. He was on his own cot, and Captain Hale and an M.O. were beside him.

Captain Hale began, "Sir, how do you—"

"The Dragon—" Drury interrupted.

"Safe. We got a new prop on faster than—than you could shine a pair of boots," Hale grinned. "And flew it back to a secret field. And we've found a blind spot, sir, right under the tail! We'll make short work of those crates now."

"And Livingston—"

"All right, sir. But Gregg—" He nodded significantly.

"Easier than the squad," Drury said soberly.

The captain nodded. "It's a funny thing, sir, when you first came, he said

it was a good thing you shone at the foot, because you'd never shine at the head—and a boot proved his undoing."

"If he had kept his boots shined," Drury sighed. "He would have known that polish makes them soft and easy to pull off, and he might have foreseen the possibilities of what I did. But he didn't, and that's his hard luck."

"He didn't think of another thing," Hale added. "That you might shine on the chest."

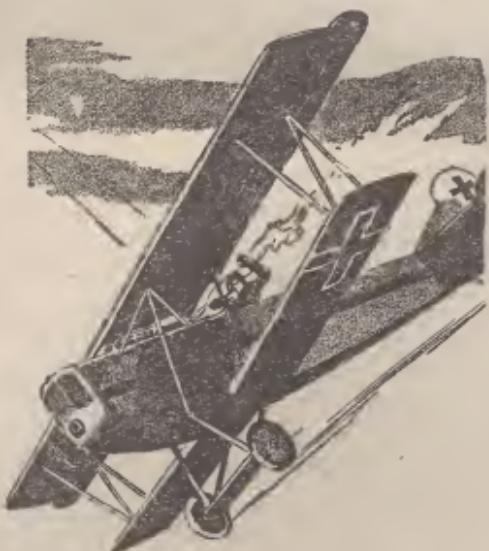
He grinned, and significantly traced on his tunic with his forefinger the outline of a Victoria Cross.

THE END

WHO IS BOLO?

Next month, in the July issue of this magazine, you will be introduced to the fiercest character ever to fly the Western Front! Bolo—master and butcher of pilots, a veritable God in his own domain who controls the destinies of men. The identity of Bolo, Vulture of the Skyways, shall not be made known until publication of our July issue. However, we may as well tell you that there shall be stories by Robert Sidney Bowen, William Hartley, Robert J. Hogan and all your favorites, together with Fred Blakeslee's newest sky game, fact features and many more thrills for the air-minded. See you then.

July Issue on Sale May 25



DARE-DEVIL
ACES



The HOT AIR CLUB

Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

IF MY little vultures will kindly desist from opening each other's throats, and one of you bums will be so good as to slam the hangar door, preferably on your fingers, the meeting will proceed. But where it will proceed to, no one really knows, though my guess is the slap-hatch. That's why you can't smell Louie around, pals—for Louie is in the slap-hatch, too. A simple soul, poor Louie trusted the authorities, who were much too clever for my simple stooge. It all happened like this:

Louie was climbing around the roof of the hanger, minding his own business and eating shingles. A guy comes up to the Lush and says, "Look!" Whereupon the Lush looks and sees a very fascinating contraption dangling before him. "Parachute," says the man, and right away Louie wants to put it on and jump off the roof, especially since he knows that Ginsburg is the world's greatest parachute jumper, and figures I will be very happy to see him land on his skull. So the authorities trick Louie into trying on the gadget, and he does not find till later that it is a straightjacket. Of course, if Louie wanted to flex his muscles he could rip the straightjacket to pieces, but Louie is not very smart and to date he has not figured these things out. Besides, he likes it in the slap-hatch. The people are kind to him there; and not like the hyenas around this joint who are forever stick-

ing pins in the tender heart of Ginsburg.

But I have to get this meeting out of my system, and scatter some dough about. Personally, I wouldn't award you squirts an aluminum nickle for anything short of the opportunity to beat you across the ears. However, the guys who own this philanthropic publication, have always been fond of feeding pigeons, and have a similar sympathy for you geese. And what is stranger still, we have some talent around the hangar.

Take, for example, the aeronautical masterpiece furnished us by our Merry English Cousin, Mr. Jack Howarth of 8 Carrington St., Hollinwood, Oldham, Lancashire, England. If you do not agree it is a beautiful job, you shall be forced to eat the wheels from all three planes, and have your hearts carved out by Mr. Howarth who is a very temperamental artist and a true member of the Hot Air Club.

Normally, mugs, we would furnish information concerning these ships beneath the illustration, so that those of you fog-bound sky monkeys who can read, would be able to find out what it's all about. But the hell with you guys, I'm gonna let you find out for yourselves. Just hang on long enough, you buzzards, and the light will pierce your skulls.

As for Member Howarth, I can only offer him my congratulations, along with a little matter of five bucks, just to make

him happy. Thus, John my boy, you become one of Aviation's Immortals—a guy who can kneedle a pound out of Ginsburg.

And now, dear members, we shall journey into the fields of verse. This is something I had hoped to avoid, but the art work is so generally lousy that it is necessary for us to listen to the poetry, which is worse.

First among the buck snatchers is Member Raymond Moore, who plots his crimes at 41-43 49th Street, Woodside, Long Island. Let me add before you go any further, that whatever Mr. Moore says in his poetry regarding your High Commander Ginsburg, is a lie! But even so, my friends, Mr. Moore has put to rhyme an amusing bit of fiction, and if for no other reason than to expose the guy in his true colors, we publish the following nonsense:

MEMORIAL TO GINSBURG

There was a guy called Ginsburg,
So happy and full of glee—
Who took a flight in an aeroplane
That was very sad to see.

Its motor, if it had any,
Was a knocking hunk of lead,
And the guy who called that thing a plane,
Didn't have a brain in his head.

But Ginsburg was undaunted,
And his courage, it was great,
When he took that crate up off the ground,
He knew he had taken Death's bait.

He got her up to five thousand,
Where she went into a spin.
She pulled out ten feet from the earth,
Then started in again.

She did a couple of barrel rolls,
Then started to level out,
And when she got on an even keel,
Ginsburg began to shout.

He yelled for the Army and Navy,
He yelled for help and relief;
But before the help arrived at the scene,
Ginsburg had come to grief.

He crashed beneath an oak tree,
And there he came to rest,
While the sparrows flew above him,
And the vultures perched on his vest.

And so to you young pilots,
This warning I must give:
Don't be a sap like Ginsburg—
As long as you wish to live!

A wise guy, that Moore—a very wise guy, indeed. Take away the buck, squirt, but already I can hear the thundering hoofs of Louie, the Lush. And since we are fast approaching the Lush's feeding time, Member Moore shall be properly disposed of.

You know, in a way I'm tired of all this abuse. I've been trying for more than a year to reform you slug-nutty ground-hogs without any apparent success. Occasionally I give one of you guys a dollar cash so you'll at least get your necks washed and conduct yourselves like gentlemen. But what do I get, boys, what do I get? I get a letter from a sky clown like Charles S. Schumaker of 640 Alder Street, Scranton, Pa. Member Schumaker once collected a buck from your great-hearted commander, so here are his thanks for all you bums to see:

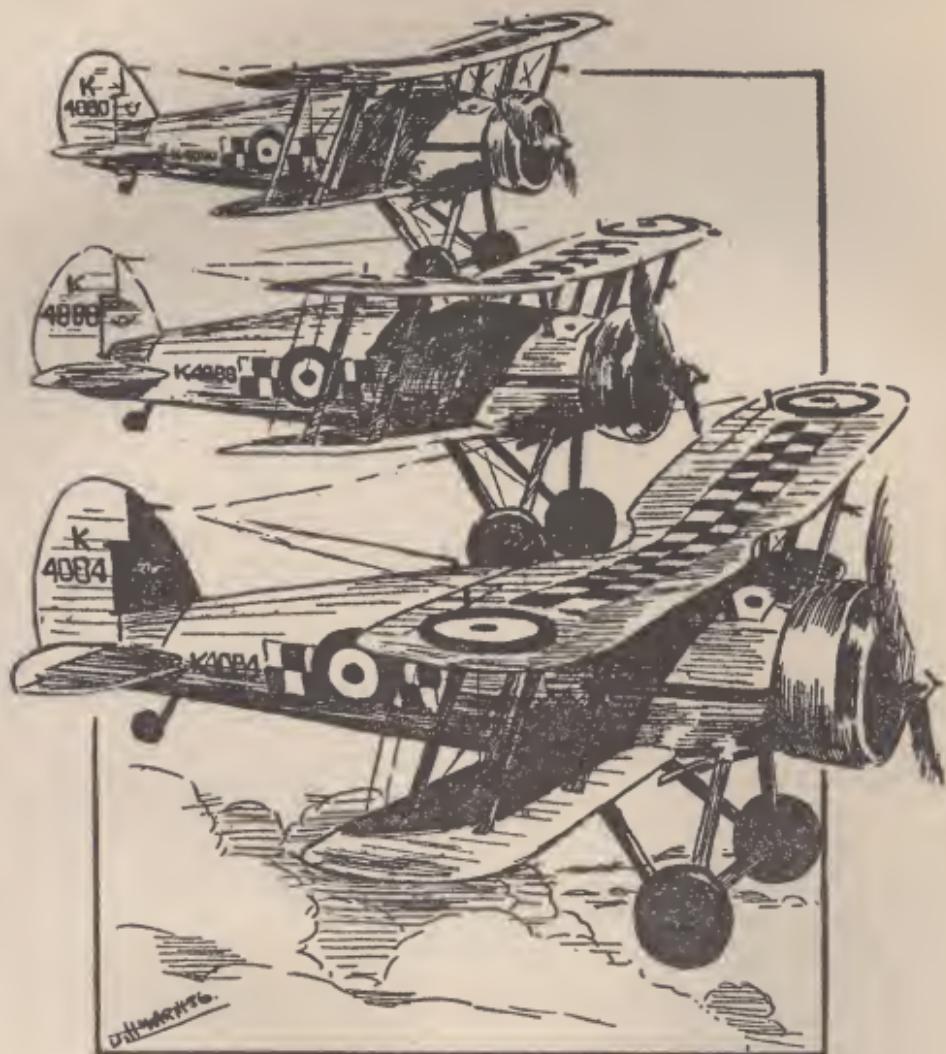
Dearest Ginsburg!!!!

Well, well, well, my old enemy "skunk-face." So I'm a two-faced Gorilla, eh? Why, you half-baked *%\$% etc., I suppose you wonder why I haven't written sooner, since I robbed you of a buck. Well, drizzlepuss, I have been minding my own business, and why don't you take the hint?

Don't look now, dogears, but you are about to get clonked on the head with another masterpiece, which was written in a moment of remorse. I get that way occasionally, especially after having a nightmare (a comedian, this squirt!). Merely thinking of you is a nightmare (ha-ha). This will, without a doubt, make Kipling, Longfellow and Poe look like the three little pigs. Keep your eyes crossed and your nose headed straight down.

Yours till you get some sense,
Charles S. Schumaker

So you can tell from the above abuse, friends, a poem accompanied Mr. Schumaker's letter. In this case I shall just say the poem was lousy, being naturally lenient and not disposed to hurt the auth-



or's feelings. Member Schumaker wins his buck for the wonderful letter he has written, in the true tradition of the Hot Air Club. But a bum's a bum, pals, and I give up.

There is another fresh squirt in our midst, a guy by the name of J. T. Kiley. Kiley lives at 57 Seymour Street, Boston, Mass., and probably thinks he's safe up there. Mr. Kiley will think differently when the Lush and I arrive in Boston to reenact the Battle of Bunker Hill. I shall not print the guy's letter, since it carries much the same tone as Member

Schumaker's. It is the gentleman's poetry that we will regard; and it is the gentleman's poetry that brings him a buck. It is a different kind of poetry, too, inasmuch as it doesn't rhyme, and why the hell he bothered to send it in anyhow, is more than I can understand. He's got an idea, though, and an idea around this joint is like oats to the Lush. So take a look, squirts, and if you think the following bit of blank verse is lousy, tell this wise guy Kiley about it, but don't bother me. This is the story of an airplane, and a heart-rending tale it is:

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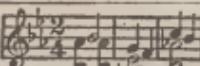
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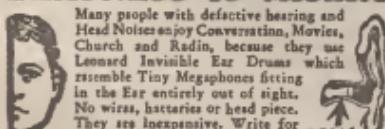
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Henry Ford manufactured but two hundred, But their mileage reaches into millions, With a total number of passengers near 900 thousand,

Including a flight across the barren polar regions.

But then came Boeing's low-wing creation, the 247,

Followed closely by the new Douglasses. Then slowly but surely the retirement of the 4ATs;

Futile proved the use of more powerful engines.

The Fords served on the short lines and branch lines, But the call for speed and quiet spelled their doom;

Lockheeds and Stinsons built for branch lines,

Deprived the sturdy old veterans of this. Thus, forlorn and forgotten, they sit, Some of them with their motors gone. Wishing, wishing for just one more flight—Fat chance!—with these Douglasses and Boeings.

The number of passengers carried by these new ships

Climbs higher and higher as time goes on. While railroad totals drop lower and lower. Thus air transportation climbs to a higher position.

Then came the Diesel powered streamliners, And the slash in railroad prices. And back to the rails go the passengers, While airline owners sit down and think.

But TWA gets the best of all novel ideas,
That of the "Flying Boxcar!"
The shipping of freight and express
By air, with regular schedules.
An oldtimer thinks of the trimotors,
So back into service they come!
Stripped of passenger equipment and windows,
With improvements and more powerful
motors.

Many a mechanic's weather-beaten face,
Lights up in a smile as they soar overhead,
Their insignia a boxcar with wings!
And for those great 4ATs, who knows what
lies ahead?

Of course, dear members, it is a hell
of a poem that doesn't rhyme, and maybe
we should give Kiley's buck to some
worthy cause, instead of wasting it on an
ungrateful lug who has so flagrantly
abused your commander. But it is Gins-
burg's policy to return good for evil, so
take it away, Kiley, you mug! And, by
the way, Kiley, just what the hell was
that poem about, anyhow?



Another wise guy is Mr. Henry Armstrong of Lansing, Michigan. Henry wins a dollar for an amazing picture of Louie the Lush when Louie was a boy. Mr. Armstrong forgets, for some reason, that Louie was never a boy, but alas, poor man, was born as he is.

The last of the magic greenbacks goes to Member John Phillips, of 617 Willow Street, Scranton, Pa. John has been in my

(Continued on next page)



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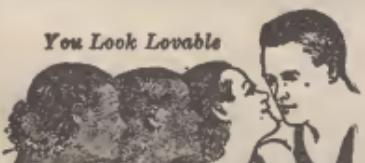
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hair before, so I guess he knows his way around. Take it away, mug, your portrait shall adorn the hangar wall. Mr. Phillips, should you sky bugs be interested, did a very clever portrait of Eddie Rickenbacker, hero of American Air.



I don't know whether I ate something I shouldn't have or what it is, dear members, but I don't feel like fooling around with you guys any longer. Ginsburg is getting old; and Ginsburg must have his rest; and you must get the hell out of here, 'cause here comes Louie.

So long,
Nosedive.

About Jack Howarth's airplane drawing a few pages back, squirts—Ginsburg will award an original Fred Blakeslee drawing to the guy who sends in the best information regarding them. This means type of plane, performance figures, and general data submitted. If you groundhogs are not smart enough, Ginsburg will tell all in an early issue.

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